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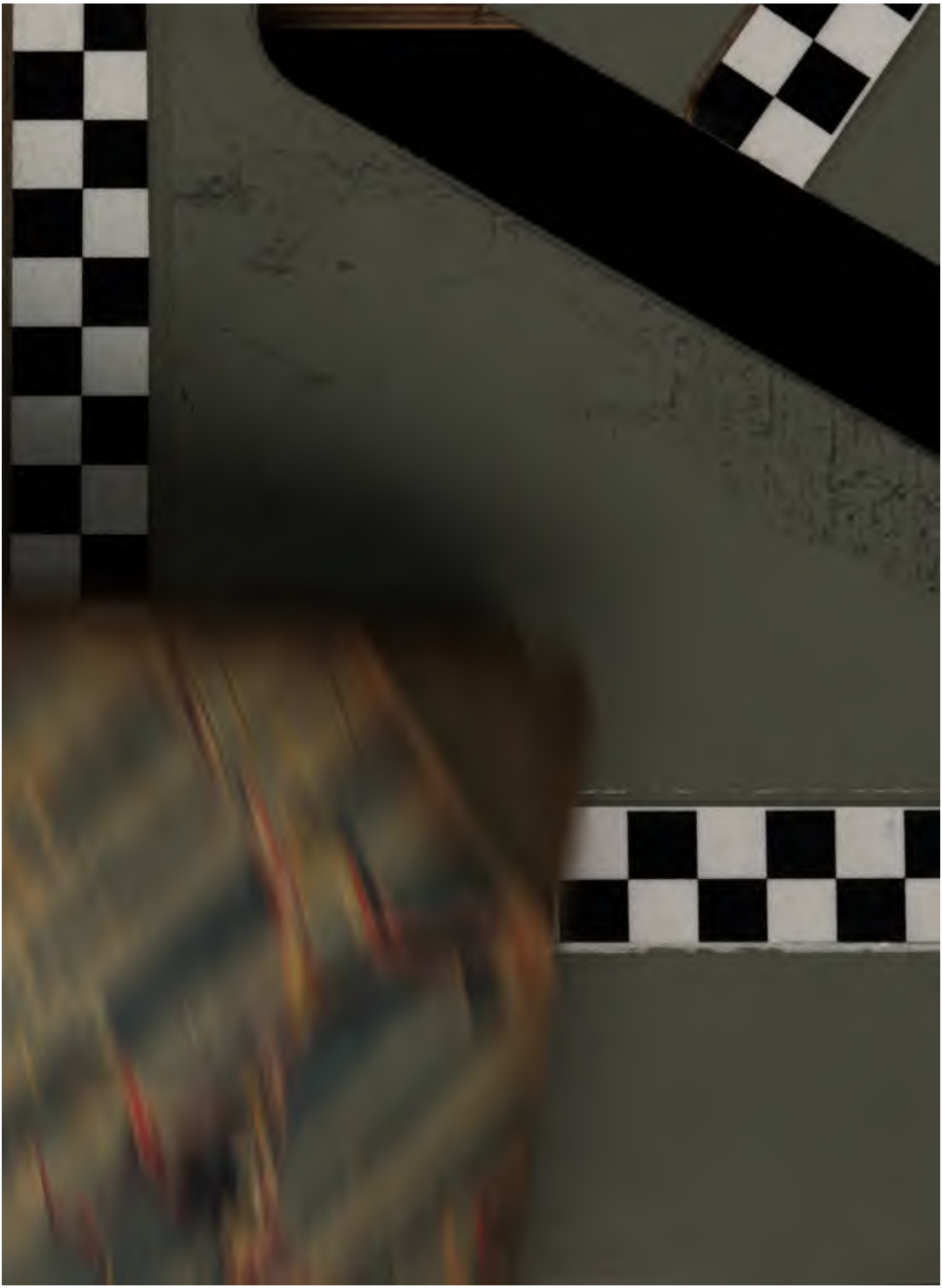

PAROCHIAL SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THE WEST INDIES.

J. H. 1828.
86

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BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS.

BY

THOMAS PARRY, M.A.
ARCHDEACON OF ANTIGUA,
AND LATE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

OXFORD,
PRINTED BY W. BAXTER,
FOR J. PARKER; AND C. AND J. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S
CHURCH-YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON.
1828.

447.

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM HART COLERIDGE, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF BARBADOES AND THE LEEWARD ISLANDS.

My Lord,

THOUGH the following Sermons are almost entirely unknown to your Lordship, the experience of past kindness leads me to hope that I shall stand excused in your indulgent opinion, for wishing to obtain for them your countenance and protection; and for venturing, therefore, to inscribe them to your Lordship, as a small token of the great respect, esteem, and gratitude, with which I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obliged, obedient,
and faithful servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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it should be with admiration and gratitude; with admiration, at what has been done since; with gratitude, that it has been done for ourselves.

But this is not all. When we place ourselves in the circumstances of the Jews who lived at the eve of the Messiah's coming, let us imagine that we heard the Baptist crying unto us, as he did unto them, "*Prepare* ye the way of the Lord;" let us picture to ourselves the venerable messenger urging us with solemn earnestness to be ready to receive his Master and our own, his and our Redeemer.

Being indeed under a different dispensation of religion from that under which the Jews were in the days of St. John, we cannot be in a literal sense the subjects of his address. We cannot be told, as the Baptist's hearers were, that the Messiah is coming in the flesh, for he is actually come: nor can we be addressed as persons entirely ignorant of the Christian religion; for into that religion we were baptized, and from our infancy have all more or less been instructed in it. Still thus much, at least, the preaching of St. John the Baptist teaches us, that something or other is *necessary beforehand, in order to a right reception of the Christian faith;* some preparation by which individuals shall be made ready to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Now as it deeply concerns us to know, whether we have rightly received the Christian faith, and

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human life is naturally a desert;—the hearts and minds of men in fact a wilderness, through which truth cannot pass without much previous preparation. To make this preparation is the first step of Christian piety. If we are unwilling to prepare the way, we must not expect to become acquainted with the glory of the Christian faith, or with its saving power.

Let us consider then in the *second* place *in what the necessary preparation consists.* "Every valley," the prophet teaches us, "shall be exalted; every mountain and hill shall be made low, the crooked places straight, and the rough places plain." How aptly does this picture represent to us the reformation which we need, in order to a right apprehension of Christian things!

First, *evrey valley must be exalted.* If there are hollow places of the desert in the path of the prince, they must be filled up and raised, before the highway can be made straight. So it is with Christian truth. The preparation for her march begins with raising what is low. If our minds are sunk in base cares, and still baser pleasures, we must not expect that truth will descend into this depth. We must not suppose that the Christian faith will forsake her holy march on high, to come down into this valley of darkness and death, where care and passion dwell. No: her

course cannot be altered; the valley must be raised. Is your great aim, for instance, to be rich, or to live in pleasure, or to obtain any earthly object? Is this your leading desire, your ruling passion, the prevailing wish of your heart, the mark of all your exertions? If so, you are in the dangerous valley; in that valley which Christ requires to be raised, into which his faith refuses to descend, and where if you stay, it must be without beholding the glory of the Lord, or seeing his salvation. From above indeed the light shines over it; and if they will lift up their eyes, the worldly and the sensual may see its brightness high over their heads; but until the valley is raised, it will not be illuminated, nor form a meet path for the steps of the Son of God. Such is the doctrine of our text: and do not our consciences bear witness to its truth? Do we not find, in proportion as our affections and our thoughts are set upon the indulgence of the appetites, or the enjoyment of the world, that our minds become unfit for saving knowledge, indisposed to Christian doctrine, averse from light, and in love with ignorance? do we not feel them *sink* in a manner *below* the path of truth, and become, as regards religion, comfortless and obscure? In the first place then, my Christian friends, if you would be found in the way of the King, beware of what is low; beware of sensual appetites and worldly cares;—if you find your

minds sinking into this depth, strive and pray against the danger: invoke the Holy Spirit's aid to raise and support you; for be assured, that *every valley must be exalted*, if you would enjoy the glorious light of salvation.

The next requisite in order that the path of Christianity in the souls of men may be free and prosperous, is described to us under the image of levelling what is high. As the hollow places must be filled up and raised, so the high places, *the mountains and hills, must be brought low.* There are no greater obstacles to religion than pride and vanity. Many who are not perhaps in any peculiar danger from a love of pleasure or of the world, may yet be in imminent peril, from these sins of vanity and pride. "How can ye believe," saith our Lord to the Jews, "who seek honour one from another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" This vain-glorious desire of human praise, when it becomes at all a prevailing passion, is sure to oppose the progress of Christian truth. 'How *can* ye believe?' is the question addressed to such, by Him who could not err. *Vain-gloriousness* and Christian faith cannot exist in the same breast: the former is as a hill in the way of the latter, and until it is removed, the soul must be a stranger to this heavenly visitant.

But if the 'hill' of vain-glory must be laid

low, how much more the mountain of *pride!* A high conceit of ourselves is at variance with the very first principles of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the atonement which Christ made upon the cross implies that we are sinners; whilst that of divine assistance reminds us that we are in ourselves helpless: of what then shall we be proud? or how shall the proud man prosper in the way of Christian truth, who cannot admit its first and fundamental doctrines? It is with the lowly that Christian wisdom dwells; it is the meek whom God will guide in judgment, and to whom he will teach his way; but the proud he resisteth, and sees them afar off, and withholdeth from them the grace of his Holy Spirit. Is there among my hearers any one who is addicted to pride? Alas! my friends, is there any one who is *not?* Pride is of all sins that, to which our frail nature is most closely wedded; and the last perhaps from which the Christian is able to escape. Still pride which we combat, differs from pride which we indulge. With the former sincere piety may be found in company; not indeed in friendly alliance, but struggling for mastery, yea striving continually to bring *the mountain low.* It is unresisted and undiminished pride, which forms the insuperable hindrance to faith. While this remains there is no hope. A proud Christian, a Christian who wilfully indulges his pride, knows nothing of

the religion which he professes. The expression is a self-contradiction. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God," is the direction which Scripture gives us; and it further teaches us, that "whosoever shall" thus "humble himself as a little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven:" it is such disciples that our Lord invites to come to him. He himself in all his greatness was meek and lowly of heart, and such too must his followers be.

To be Christians then we must first be raised in our affections, and at the same time humbled in our thoughts; *heavenly-minded*, but not *high-minded*. Moreover we must be ingenuous in disposition, and in spirit full of charity. *The crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.*

The spirit of Christianity is free and open; full of ingenuousness and candour. All winding ways she utterly abhors. Her path is straight onward. The crooked policy of the world she scorns; of her disciple we must be able to say, "Behold" a Christian "indeed, in whom is no guile." If therefore we are pursuing any crooked paths of dishonesty or disingenuousness, we may rest assured that these are not the paths of Christian faith: if we are not ingenuously desirous to know the truth, as well as honestly determined, by God's grace, to obey it, we must

not expect to arrive at that knowledge. The Christian religion comes before mankind in a plain and open manner, addressing itself with overflowing conviction to the hearts and consciences of men, offering every encouragement and help to the sincere, however simple in understanding, but withholding her light from those who are disingenuous and perverse, how great soever their talents and acquired advantages. It is to this effect the Apostle speaks in his second Epistle to the Corinthians. "We have renounced," he declares, "the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in *craftiness*, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's *conscience* in the sight of God;" to which he goes on to add the following solemn declaration; "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Such is the manner in which the Gospel deals with us, plainly and openly *commending itself to our consciences*, without any craft or deceit, and refusing to accommodate itself to those, who are bent upon pursuing, to their own destruction, the crooked paths of this world, rather than the straight one of eternity. So that if any one prefer to be ignorant still,

notwithstanding her plain instructions, she leaves him to himself, and does not force knowledge upon those who are not ingenuously inclined to receive it, but suffers them to continue in the dark and crooked ways which they have chosen.

The last particular of preparation for Christian proficiency consists in making *the rough places plain*, in rendering *even* the ruggedness of the way. By this figurative expression we may aptly understand the subduing of all uncharitable feelings and tempers. Christianity is a dispensation of peace and love: it is necessary therefore that the heart of the Christian be divested of malice, and envy, and wrath, and the other uncharitable tempers, if he would enter at all into the real views and the genuine spirit of his religion. None can be worse prepared to understand the Gospel, than he who applies himself to the study of it upon uncharitable principles. Such a one mistakes the very end and purport of our holy faith in the very threshold; and it is therefore impossible that he should become rightly acquainted with its parts. Supposing for a moment that heavenly-mindedness, humility, and honest sincerity of heart, could exist without charity, still they would be unavailing alone: it would be to little purpose to have removed the low valley, the opposing hill, or the winding road, if the way were still to be impassably rugged.

It is too often the case, in the human character, that one virtue is achieved at the expence of another. How frequently is a freedom from the grosser vices of sensuality not only accompanied by, but actually productive of, spiritual pride! or again the removal of pride followed by a sacrifice of purity of morals! In the same manner, honesty and openness of character are too apt to degenerate into uncourteous inconsideration or coarse asperity; whilst kindness, on the other hand, is extended to unworthy compliances with the customs of men, or weak indulgence to their vices. The character of the Christian disciple must be formed on a different principle. With him it must not be an *exchange of vices*, but a renunciation of them all. The valley must not be converted into a mountain; nor the crooked path be rugged when it has lost its windings. But all obstructions must be removed, and "the way of the Lord" be, in every respect, prepared for the free admission of his truth.

From the explanation of the doctrine of the text, suffer me now in the *last* place to point out briefly, as was proposed, a few considerations connected with its application.

The great body of professing Christians may, in a general manner, be divided into those who are practically in earnest on the subject of religion, and those who are not.

And first I could wish to offer a remark or two to the attention of the latter; even to those who are not anxious to make progress in the Christian faith, if any such there be in this assembly. Of such we might well ask, From what cause is it that your indifference to your religion springs? Is it that you have proved it false? "No," you will reply; "we know the Gospel to be infallibly true; we know that it came from heaven; that at first it was preached by the Son of God himself, and afterwards by holy men who laid down their lives in its behalf, whilst God himself bore witness to them by numberless signs and wonders, which he enabled them to perform. On its very front too it bears the stamp of sincerity, and openness, and truth. We do not believe it false; it is not for this reason that we have practically neglected it. Do us not this dishonour; we may be inconsistent Christians, but we are not infidels." Alas! my friends, for this miserable comfort, with which so many seem to satisfy their consciences! What avails it to acknowledge Christianity to be true, if you do not *live* by its truths?

But to proceed; perhaps, though you allow our faith to be true, you do not think it worthy of your *serious* regard? There are many truths which are of little or no importance; of slight consequence to our happiness, and therefore such as may be safely neglected. Is this, suppose ye,

the case with the truths of religion? Are they trifling and insignificant, unimportant to our happiness, and such as may be neglected with safety? Or is not the bare supposition replete with folly? Christianity is the child of the Divine Wisdom. The recovery of the human race from death and misery, the restoration of man to happiness and glory—these are its objects; and eternity—the great for ever—is the period, through which the influence of its truths will operate. To despise it, is impossible; to hold it unworthy of the most serious regard, is madness.

What then is the real cause, why so many do in fact neglect religion? Is it because she requires sacrifices, which they are unwilling to make? Is it because to be Christians, we must renounce what is low and sensual, what is proud and lofty, what is crooked and disingenuous, what is rugged and uncharitable? Are not *these* the great obstacles, at which most men stumble? *these* the objections which they feel to practical religion? If so, how melancholy a case is this! We cling to the disease, and therefore spurn the remedy; we dislike the light, because our consciences shrink from the disclosures which it would make to us; and inasmuch as we like better the low haunts of the world, its lofty hills, its crooked paths, or even its rough ways of uncharitableness, for this reason it is that we

are not found in the straight way of the Gospel, which, though narrow, is yet, when fully tried, a way of pleasantness and a path of peace.

Finally, let me address a few words to those who are earnest in the Christian life; and who, in particular, are thirsting for a farther acquaintance with the excellence of the Gospel.

In order to success in this happy object, I need not remind you, how necessary it is to avail yourselves diligently and constantly of the appointed means of religious knowledge; to read the Scriptures habitually, to attend to public instruction, and to pray for the enlightening grace of God's Holy Spirit. But besides these *direct means* of knowledge, we learn, from what we have been at present considering, that something more is necessary, and that if we would make effectual progress in faith, we must be scrupulously attentive to the *regulation of the character*, that our affections may be raised, our thoughts humbled, our dispositions sincere, our tempers full of charity. These are indispensable, and most powerful helps to faith. "If any man," saith our Lord, "is willing to do the will of Him that sent me, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;" thus inculcating upon us a spirit of holiness, as the great help to a knowledge of the truth. To the same effect our Lord also speaks of the seed of God's word, as thriving only in an honest and good heart;

in a heart turned to God by sincere repentance, so as to desire to pursue whatever is excellent and good. Thus too the apostle St. Peter exhorts "to add to our faith" various graces, and tells us, at the close of his exhortation, that "if such graces be in us and abound, we shall not be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." But continues the apostle, "he who lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off." "Prepare ye then the way of the Lord, make his paths straight:" let every valley be raised, and every mountain and hill be brought low; the crooked paths let them become straight, and the rough ways be made smooth.

In other words, put away sensuality and earthly-mindedness; put away pride and vain-glory; put away deceit and guile, together with every malevolent, envious, and uncharitable temper; then shall ye be fit disciples in the school of Christ, so as to understand his truth: yea, then shall ye see the glory of the Lord, even *the salvation of our God.*

SERMON II.

CHRISTIAN REJOICING.

LUKE ii. 10, 11.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

IT will be remembered, that these words were originally spoken to a company of shepherds, who were watching their flocks in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem; and that the person who spoke them was an angel, sent by God to announce to these favoured shepherds the birth of the Redeemer, which had just taken place. This was the joyful news communicated by the heavenly messenger. The shepherds, when the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, "were sore afraid." The mysterious message terrified them. Conscious of frailty, man shrinks from communion with the world of spirits. Not sufficiently accustomed to look up to God as his Benefactor, and upon the angels as his friends, he turns with terror from

the visions of another world, even when they are, most clearly, of a heavenly and benignant character. So often do we mistake the real nature of things, and shun with fear the overtures of mercy. The shepherds were sore afraid, but "the angel said unto them, Fear not:" mine is no message of terror, "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

In discoursing to you upon this heavenly message, I shall endeavour, with the divine blessing, to place before you in a profitable light the following particulars:

I. That the birth of Jesus of Nazareth *is* an occasion of great joy.

II. *Why* it is so.

III. That it is intended to be so to *all* people.

IV. That therefore it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to rejoice in this great event.

I. I shall observe, that the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth *is* an occasion of great joy.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy," is the declaration of the angel. The terms are full of a beautiful energy, "*good* tidings of *great* joy." Such is the Gospel of Christ, when rightly understood, when viewed as angels view it. Most of my hearers are, I suppose, aware, that the word Gospel does itself mean, 'good-tidings;' and

that, as applied to the Christian dispensation, it means the joyful message of salvation by Jesus Christ. And it is worthy of remark, that the very expression which in our text is rendered, 'I bring good tidings,' is, in other parts, translated, 'I preach the Gospel,' both renderings being the same in point of meaning. From all this we should observe, that the preaching of Christ, whatever it may appear to some, is in itself the publication of joyful tidings, and represented as such continually in Scripture, the very name of the Gospel having *this* signification.

The representations which Scripture gives of the joyful character of the Christian dispensation are indeed so very remarkable and full of emphasis, that I cannot refrain from calling to your recollection one or two more examples of them. And here I need scarcely remind you of the conclusion of the passage from which my text is taken; for "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Behold the armies of heaven struck with the honour that should redound to God's glorious attributes of goodness and mercy from the incarnation of Christ, and affectionately exulting in the blessed consequences that should flow to mankind, "on earth peace, good will toward men," from Him, who had found too much reason to cast them off

for ever. Another passage, in which the joyful character of the Christian dispensation is strongly put before us, will be found in the 52d chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. "How beautiful upon the mountains," exclaims the prophet, "are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, 'Thy God reigneth!' Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." In this prediction of the Gospel by the prophet, the expressions concerning its joyful tenour are, if possible, stronger than those used by the angel and his celestial army. Whether then we individually feel it to be so or not, we have here most convincing proof, that the dispensation of Christ is, by God himself, intended to be to us a dispensation of joy: it is so declared by the tongues of his angels and prophets; and of this gracious truth we are continually reminded, whenever the Christian faith is expressed to us under the title of Gospel.

II. Let us now proceed to enquire, in the second place, *why* it is so; or for what reasons this character is in Scripture ascribed to the religion of Christ.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy," said the angel; and the reason immediately follows; "for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a *Saviour*, which is Christ the Lord." To save is to deliver, and to preserve. A Saviour is one who is at once a deliverer and preserver; so that news of salvation may in any case be styled 'good tidings.' "I bring you good tidings, for unto you is born a Saviour."

But all good tidings are not, of necessity, good tidings "of *great* joy:" if the deliverance is of an ordinary nature, from some slight pressure of temporary distress, the tidings may be good, without being in any great degree joyful. But it was to no common deliverance that the message of the angel related.

The deliverance may generally be judged of from the rank and character of the Deliverer, the work from the Agent. It is no light matter to which mighty succour is lent. And what if that succour be the arm of heaven itself? What if it be the Son of God, who comes forth to deliver? if the only-begotten of the Father, who was in the beginning with God, and is himself God, descends to our aid? Yet such is the Deliverer spoken of by the angel: "unto you is born

this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ *the Lord.*"

The title of 'Lord,' when used by way of emphasis, means, in Scripture, that Being, who is Lord of the whole world; and it is in that sense it is here used concerning the Saviour who was born at Bethlehem; and who is called Christ and Anointed, as being in a spiritual sense anointed, or endued with the Holy Ghost, to the office of Saviour. It is thus the apostle instructs us to interpret the titles 'Christ,' and 'Lord,' when, speaking of the dignity of Christ's person, and having told us that he made the worlds and upholds them, that he is far above all angels, being even an object of worship to them, he goes on to say, "But unto the Son God saith, Thy throne, O *God*, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, wherefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, *Lord*, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of *thy* hands." In this passage, you will observe, that the apostle is speaking of Christ, or the Anointed, of him whom God hath anointed with the oil of gladness *above his fellows;* and you will observe farther, that he also calls him 'Lord,' even that Lord, who in the beginning laid the foundation

of the earth, and whose work the heavens are.

Thus we have the words of the angels explained to us by the comment of an apostle: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, Christ the Lord. In the form indeed of a new-born infant ye shall find your Deliverer; who is, however, none other than Jehovah himself, the Lord of heaven and earth, incarnate for your salvation, and anointed to this office by the cheering Spirit of God, that oil of gladness, which is poured upon him without measure in a degree far above any of those, however favoured, whose nature he has vouchsafed to share."

If then our salvation is to be judged of from the greatness of the Saviour, it may truly be called a *great* salvation, according to what is said of it by the apostle on a very similar ground. "For if," he argues, "the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so *great salvation*, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" In so great deliverance then we may well rejoice; we may well call the news of it "good tidings of great joy," since there is born to us this day so mighty a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord from heaven.

But that we may rejoice, not only with the spirit, but with the understanding also, let us

enquire wherein this salvation consists. What is the misery or the danger, from which the Son of God came to deliver us? In order to value aright the love of our Redeemer, we should ascertain the nature of our redemption. But it is difficult either to communicate or form any adequate notion on this subject. We are both by nature and habit so little sensible either of the importance or the reality of spiritual things, that it is for the most part a thing almost impossible to impress upon men's minds any sincere value for such deliverances. Bodily pain and sickness, or worldly poverty, are evils which men understand well enough; and deliverances from them they *do* receive with joy. But talk to them of the poverty, and pains, and sickness, of the soul, of the calamity of being without righteousness, destitute of the divine favour, or disordered with unholy affections, and their concern is immediately at an end. They view what is said "as a tale that is told," and either smile or slumber as it proceeds. Hence the difficulty of producing, in the minds of men, any fit sense of the deliverance which has been wrought for them by Christ. Such a sense must indeed in every case be the work of the Holy Spirit. It is He who must guide us to discern that truth, which He guided prophets and apostles to reveal. Still the ministers of Christ are not to neglect their duty in despair. Though it is "God who giveth the

increase," it is appointed to them 'to plant and to water;' and they do it the more gladly, because they know that God's Holy Spirit is ever ready to bless their endeavours, and to enlighten each one of their hearers who prays for his help, and is sincere in the enquiry after truth. If men have not that sense of spiritual things which it is their interest to have, it is clearly their own fault. God is willing to give it, if they will but honestly endeavour and pray that they may obtain it. The careless and indolent may indeed ask with Pilate, 'What is truth?' and with him may receive no answer. But the sincere enquirer shall not be disappointed: the hungry soul shall not be sent empty away.

Relying then upon this grace of God, offered freely to all who will apply for it in penitence and prayer, let us seriously enquire, what state mankind would have been in, had not Christ come to save them. We all know that man forfeited Paradise by transgression; that other consequences of this transgression were a corruption of our nature, and the introduction of sin into the world. With this state of things, this pollution of his own creation, this abuse of our free agency, God was justly offended: we had estranged ourselves from him, had become his enemies by wicked works, and lay under his awful displeasure, "being by nature children of wrath," or objects of the divine anger. This is

the state in which we are without Christ, and whilst in this state we are fitly said to be 'lost;' agreeably to what our Saviour declares, that he "came to seek and to save that which is lost." Observe then what our state is without salvation. It is a state of transgression, of misery, of divine displeasure, and, to conclude all, a state of helplessness. We had sinned, by sin we had rendered ourselves miserable, had offended our Maker, and were unable to help ourselves; unable, by any remaining strength of our own, either to recover our original righteousness and bliss, or to atone to God for what we had done, that so we might regain his favour and help. Thus was man lost; shut out from paradise, and, as far as depended upon himself, shut out from hope. This is humiliating to reflect upon, yet it is nevertheless true.

When we had thus brought into the creation of God sin and woe, it pleased him in his mercy not to leave us to ourselves. The Son of the Most High took compassion upon us in our misery. "He looked," saith the prophet, "and there was none to help, and wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore *his own* arm brought salvation." For, as the apostle St. Paul instructs us, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly;" died for us when we were yet sinners; procured reconciliation for us, when we were the enemies

of God by wicked works. This is the deliverance which Christ has wrought for us. Let us consider well its nature. We were enemies to whom? To the Almighty. To Him, who is to his enemies 'a consuming fire.' Alas! from such enmity what was likely to accrue to ourselves but ruin? Accordingly we lay under a curse, a fearful sentence of condemnation, denounced "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Had we been left to ourselves, we could not have helped ourselves, but should have perished for ever. It was in this emergency that the Son of God interfered between us and death: so that we may well exclaim, in the prophetic words of Zacharias, "Blessed be the Lord, for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."

Nor is it merely for deliverance from the *punishment* of sin that we are indebted to Christ. Independently of all subsequent penalties, how miserable a thing in itself is it to be a sinner! Between sin and happiness there is an impassable gulf fixed. They are divided from each other for ever. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith our God." Hence deliverance from sin, as well as from death, the wages of sin, is among the first of blessings: and for this blessing is every one, that enjoys it, indebted to Christ.

It is in consequence of his appearance in the flesh, and by his ever-enduring mediation, that we obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit to help us in each time of our need. Through him it is granted us, "that being delivered from the hands of our" spiritual "enemies, we should serve God without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life."

As justification or the pardon of our sins, and sanctification or our renewal unto holiness, are derived to us through Christ, so it is through Him that we look for eternal glory. He not only reconciles us to God, and enables us to serve Him, but it is He alone who can bring us to the glorious presence of God hereafter. When the faithful Christian has finished his course; when after having trusted in the divine mercy through Jesus Christ, and obeyed the divine will, he is laid in the grave; it is through the might of his Redeemer that he shall burst the bonds of that grave again, and rise to everlasting joy. The salvation, which is wrought by the Son of David, has a beginning, but it has no end. It is no temporary blessing; no flash of momentary triumph, bright for a while, and then forgotten. When every thing earthly shall have passed by for ever, it shall then awake in its strength; death shall give it new vigour; and eternal ages shall add to it continual increase. Is not this a

salvation, with the contemplation of which even angels may be overpowered? Are not these *good tidings of great joy?*

III. And to whom are these tidings brought? Was it only to the shepherds of Bethlehem? or are they not intended for all mankind? "Behold, I bring you good tidings, which shall be to *all people.*" This is what it was proposed in the third place to consider; that the message of the angel was intended to be a message of joy to all. The invitation of the Gospel is universal: it has no respect of persons: it cries out to all, "Ho! *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" come to the waters of life all ye that thirst after happiness. "Him that cometh unto me," saith our Lord, "I will in no wise cast out;" and he accordingly rebukes the unbelieving Jews for not coming unto him, that they might have life, even as the Pharisees are said to have rejected the counsel of God respecting themselves. Let no man therefore say that he has nothing to do with the "good tidings of great joy" announced by the angel. They are intended for all; I say, *intended*; but, by our unbelief and sin, this intention, as far as we ourselves are concerned, may indeed be frustrated. Joyful as the Gospel is in itself, it ceases to be so when it is treated as its Author was, "despised and rejected of men." It then indeed assumes a voice of terror; the Lamb

of God may be roused to anger; and 'what wrath shall be so terrible as that of the Lamb?' What indignation so to be dreaded, as that of despised and affronted mercy? If the Gospel is not, as, alas! it is not, a message of joy to some, this follows entirely from their wilful rejection of it; from a proud reluctance to accept the pardon through Him through whom it is offered, even through 'Christ the Lord.' If such men perish, it is from no want of grace in the Gospel, but from obstinacy in themselves; so that, notwithstanding their rejection of it, and their consequent exclusion from its blessings, the Gospel must not forfeit its title, but will still continue to be, in itself, a glad message of great joy *to all people*.

IV. I come now to the last point proposed for our consideration; the *duty of rejoicing* in the Gospel of Christ. "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice;" is the emphatic exhortation of the apostle. We have seen that the Gospel is for all; and that none are excluded, but such as exclude themselves. Let us take heed that we be not of this number. Let us take heed that we be not only amongst its professed, but amongst its sincere, disciples, before we presume to rejoice; otherwise our joy will be without foundation. If there is still in us an evil heart of unbelief, an inordinate love of the things

of this life, a wilful indulgence of any known sin, a wilful omission of any known duty, in vain do we claim a participation in the joys of the Gospel; they are not for us. They are for the penitent, and for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for those who hate their past rebellion, acknowledging it with sorrow, and seeking with humble anxiety pardon and reformation; for those who are anxious to return to their allegiance to the Lord of their souls, anxious to shew their gratitude and love to their merciful King, by cheerfully and constantly obeying his laws. If such be your case, my brethren, then "*rejoice* in the Lord; and again I say, rejoice:" "rejoice evermore:" and particularly on the present occasion, on this great festival of the nativity of our Lord, let your joy be conspicuous.

But remember, at the same time, that it be a joy suited to the occasion of it. Let it be a holy joy: let it be chiefly a religious joy. There is indeed, on occasions like the present, a certain degree of outward festivity, which is not to be condemned, but is on the contrary becoming, so long as it confines itself within the bounds of moderation and reason; and still more so, if it communicates itself from the rich to our poorer fellow Christians. Boisterous mirth and sensual excess, which are sometimes made the rejoicings of this season, are but ill suited to celebrate the birth of the meek and holy Saviour. But mode-

rate and rational festivity are not to be condemned; at the same time, let us again take care to make our joy chiefly of a religious kind; and especially let those who consider the salvation of Christ an occasion of rejoicing, gladly meet, at the eucharistic feast of his holy Supper, to celebrate together his great love, to acknowledge their need of it, to shew their gratitude for it, and to dedicate themselves anew to Him, who came to "seek and to save them, when they were lost."

SERMON III.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF A CHRISTIAN DEATH.

REV. xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.

THE subject of death is presented to our consideration this day[a] in the most awful and encouraging light; on the one hand the most awful, on the other the most encouraging. It is the death of the Son of God; it is the death of the Redeemer of mankind.

I. Let us view it in the *first* place, as it is a subject of the most *awful* importance.

It cannot be denied, that the blessings pronounced in sacred writ, are many of them quite contrary to the prevailing sentiments of men. Blessed are the *poor* in spirit: blessed are they that *mourn:* blessed are they *that are persecuted* for righteousness' sake: and here again, Blessed are the *dead.* Nothing so much evinces the excellence of Christianity, above all the boasted

[a] Good-Friday.

systems of philosophy, as this its divine power of extracting honey from very wormwood, and of converting even curses into blessings.

For, in itself, what is death but a *curse?* What is its attendant pain, what the loss of this life, and the gloomy uncertainty which naturally hangs over the next? What is all this but the "wages of sin," the penalty denounced upon the first act of man's rebellion against his God? "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die:" so death passed upon all men, as a part of the condemnation entailed, by the one offence of Adam, on his thereby corrupted race.

The awful nature of this curse can in no way be more forcibly exhibited, than it is in the ransom which was necessary to redeem us from it; the infinitely precious blood of the Son of God. It is this alone which has converted the curse of death into an unspeakable blessing. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who hath deprived death of its sting, and made its wound harmless, yea salutary. The "bliss of dying" belongs only to the "dying Christian." The voice from heaven bade St. John write them "blessed which die in the Lord:" not those who die generally, but those *who die in the Lord.* To the impenitent death is still the wages of sin; still a condemnation and a curse. Its bitterness is not passed away to them, but increased a hundredfold, by their wilful refusal of the redeeming

mercy of God. The doom denounced upon Adam's sin was equivalent to his one offence; that which now awaits the wicked will be proportioned to their own multiplied transgressions. Though redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ from the effects of Adam's condemnation, they may yet incur a "much sorer punishment," if by their unbelief and wilful sins they do, as it were, "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace." Let us beware then, how we extend the encouragements of Scripture beyond their scriptural limitations. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." But wretched still and miserable are they, who die in impenitence and unbelief. To them there is no prospect, such as that held out by the voice from heaven, of rest from their labours, and a merciful reward of their works; but instead of this cheering expectation, "a certain fearful looking for of judgment," and the "indignant fire" before them, "which is to devour the adversaries" of God and of Christ. The death of those who sin wilfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel, will be without remedy; it will open the way to a far more tremendous death in the world to come; even to death that will be felt; a death, which will be not merely the absence of being, but the presence of everlasting

dying; a state of lasting death, commensurate in its duration with the happiness of the blessed; for "everlasting punishment" is no less certainly denounced in Scripture to the wicked, than "life everlasting" is promised to the righteous[a]: finally the state of the wicked in the world to come will be a state of irrecoverable death, where "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins," to redeem the soul from everlasting burnings, and to restore it again, as some have falsely taught, to God and bliss.

II. But let us turn from this awful view of death, not indeed with forgetfulness and presumptuous hopes, but with penitent hearts, and a lively faith, to that *consolatory and cheering prospect*, which our Lord has opened, to his true followers, through the gloom and horrors of the grave.

We have considered the death of Christ, as it is the death of the Son of God, exhibiting, in the ransom paid, the weight of that curse, under which we lay in being subject to mortality. Let us now view the same mysterious event, as it is the death of the Redeemer of mankind; not only as it is a ransom necessary to be paid; but as it is a ransom accepted of God to the removal of the curse. The subject is full of melancholy

[a] Matt. xxv. 46.

interest to all, when we reflect upon what Christ suffered, and that we, in reality, were in part the cause; it is full of awful warning, as we have already shewn, to those who, whether obstinately or thoughtlessly, will go on in sin; but it is full of peace to the penitent believer in the sacrifice of the death of Christ. By dying our Lord has overcome death, and rendered it not only tolerable, but even blessed to his followers. The penalty of sin has become, to the Christian, a means of deliverance from its power; the end of life is changed into its true beginning; the gate that opened into the land of darkness and dread, now leads to another and a brighter paradise, than the one we lost in Adam.

But to whom is death thus changed? To those, saith the voice from heaven, "who die in the Lord." Who then are they that answer to this description? Let us consider this attentively, that we may apply the promise safely, and reckon with scriptural hope upon the bliss of dying.

The chapter in which our text occurs, foretells the reformation of the Christian Church from the errors and pollutions of popery. Among the papal errors there was one directly opposed to the doctrine of our text. The Romish Church maintains, in her doctrine of purgatory, that, in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, the souls of the righteous expiate

by their own sufferings the remainder of their guilt. Against this doctrine did Luther raise his voice, and preach, according to the Scriptures, the sole sufficiency of the blood of Christ to cleanse from all sin. "From henceforth," agreeably to the prophecy in our text, it has been openly and unequivocally taught in the Protestant Church, that the righteous have no purgatory to undergo, but are blessed immediately upon their death, resting even from their labours, much more from their sufferings, and receiving, for Christ's sake, the gracious reward of their obedience. The doctrine was true from the first. It was, however, hidden by the anti-christian Church of Rome, and men were taught to believe differently, until their minds were opened to the truth through the preaching of the reformers: thenceforth it has never been doubted amongst true Protestants, but that "the dead who die in the Lord" are blessed immediately upon their dissolution, without any purgatorial pains to retard their bliss.

But we have still to determine what is meant by dying in the Lord. The phrase in its most appropriate signification means, probably, the death of Christian martyrdom, and it alludes more especially to those who suffered death at the reformation "for the testimony of Jesus Christ." These holy martyrs are most properly said to have "died in the Lord," and with St.

Stephen to have fallen "asleep in Jesus." *Their* deaths are to be considered particularly blessed, in consideration of the vast recompense which He, for whom they died, would bestow upon them.

But the words are also capable of a much wider and farther extension. To die in the Lord is true of every one who dies a Christian death; who dies, not, like the beasts that perish, without a thought of what will be hereafter; not, like the presumptuous infidel, blaspheming his Redeemer, or trembling at his long-insulted name; not, like the hardened sinner, torn from his sins, yet not forsaking them, longing for life only to return to his unholy pursuits, and disrelishing the thoughts even of heaven itself, divested of the pleasures of sense, or the enjoyments of wealth and honour. Not so do they die, who die in the Lord; but with thoughts full of immortality, with minds sensible of the value of their souls, aware of the judgment to come, alive to a sense of their own unworthiness before a holy God, but relying upon his revealed mercy in Jesus Christ, that the sins, of which they have repented, will be forgiven and left behind them in this world, whilst their well-intended services, though full of imperfections, will be accepted for Christ's sake, and allowed to "follow them." But thus to die in the Lord, we must first live unto him. A Christian death is, properly speak-

ing, the *close of a Christian life.* If we would die the death of the righteous, we must live his life. Our latter end cannot resemble his, if the previous part of our lives be altogether different. "To me," saith the apostle, "to die is gain." But why? because to him also "to live was Christ." We are in Christ by baptism ingrafted into his body in that mysterious sacrament. But by unbelief and unrighteousness, we may lose our station as members of Christ. "Every branch in Him that beareth not fruit shall be taken away, and cast forth to wither[b]." It is not then our admission by baptism into the body of Christ's Church, inestimable as that privilege is to those who avail themselves of it, that will ensure our dying in the Lord; but it is our continuing in Christ, by faith and good works, like fruitful branches. It is a life influenced by faith in God through Christ, and spent in serving him, that leads to a blessed death. The phrase "to be *in Christ*," similar to the one which we are now considering, is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament. Now, I presume, it will be acknowledged, that none can 'die in the Lord,' but those 'who are in Christ Jesus.' In plainer language, no one can die a Christian, who is not a Christian. But to be a Christian, when we are of an age to be responsible for our faith and practice,

[b] John xv. 2, 6.

implies a great deal. "If any man be in Christ," saith the apostle, "he is a new creature;" and again, "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit," so as to "fulfil the righteousness of the law." Once more, "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love." If then we would continue members of Christ, so as to die at last in saving communion with him, we must not live after the will and desires of the flesh, but, by the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, we must shew ourselves to be true members of that moral world, which has been regenerated through Jesus Christ, and created as it were anew unto good works.

I am aware it may be said, that many repent even on their death-bed, and therefore "die in the Lord," though they may not have lived to him. We have unquestionably one instance of this kind recorded in Scripture; but, let it be remembered, we have only one. We have *one*, it has been well observed, to preclude despair; we have *only one*, to forbid presumption. Shall we madly take this solitary precedent to encourage ourselves in thoughtlessness and sin to the very last, rather than receive instruction from the general tenor both of scriptural doctrine and of Scripture history? How numerous are the instances of patient perseverance in piety, com-

pared with this one instance of dying contrition! With respect, moreover, to this very example, how little do we know of the disadvantages under which the penitent thief had laboured in the previous part of his life! Perhaps, bred among robbers, he had been from his earliest years out of the reach of salutary instruction or profitable example; most probably he had never seen our Lord, or heard him until now. How little encouragement would such a case afford to those who sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth! The Almighty offers his grace to us now, but if we put off our repentance, are we sure that the Spirit of God will always continue to strive with us, and never abandon us to a reprobate mind? Even should the procrastinating sinner be allowed grace to repent at last, what opportunity can a death-bed afford him to prove that his penitence is sincere? What "fruits meet for repentance" can he then bring forth? The case of the penitent thief was, in this respect, singular. Our Lord, who knew his heart, pronounced expressly upon his sincerity. Without some such extraordinary assurance, which we have no reason to expect, there can be no essential comfort in a death-bed repentance; no well-grounded persuasion that those who die thus, die in the Lord. There is, at least, one part of the blessing, which repentance so long delayed must necessarily forfeit.

The works of the righteous 'follow' them to the land of blessedness. But he who never even repented till he was dying, can have no works to follow him, which would contribute to his bliss.

I conclude then that the blessing of our text was intended principally for Christian martyrs, but that it belongs to all, who live and die in that true faith of Christ, which worketh by love to God and man.

III. In the *third* place I propose to consider the *nature* of the blessing, which awaits the Christian at his death.

The Romanists have their purgatory, opposed to the declaration of our text. Others there have been, among professed Protestants, who have supposed the state of the soul, between death and the resurrection, to be a state of sleep and insensibility. Not so speak the Scriptures. "*To-day* shalt thou be with me *in paradise*," said our blessed Lord to the dying penitent: St. Paul desired "to depart, and *to be with Christ*," as a far better thing than to remain in this life. He spoke of it as an undoubted point, that "to be absent from the body" was "to be *present with the Lord*." To the same effect, our text describes the departed Christian, not as insensible to good or evil, but as happy, enjoying rest from his labours, and reaping the blessed consequences

of the works of faith and love, which by the grace of God he had been enabled to perform.

Such, observe, is the state of blessedness upon which the disembodied souls of the righteous immediately enter. They rest from their labours. "The wicked cease from troubling" them any more: and however wearied here by affliction and toil, or, worse than all, by conflict with their own corruptions, they are now *at rest*. Their works also do follow them; and according to their works, so will they, for Christ's sake, be richly rewarded. They are in fact, though not instated in the fulness of bliss which awaits them after the resurrection, yet they are already in paradise, for so our Lord calls this intermediate state, and they are looking forward with certainty to the glories of heaven. At the day of judgment, the doom of the righteous and of the wicked will not so much be decided, as *declared*, before an assembled universe, and their happiness or misery completed by the reunion of the body to the soul. The destiny of both will be decided at their deaths. Lazarus no sooner dies, than he is carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The selfish Dives too departs immediately from his luxuries into preparatory torment. To rest even from labour, which is the lot of the righteous in paradise, must be indeed a 'blessed' change: how much more, from the greater ills of life; from pain, and care, and

sickness, and sorrow; from loss of friends, from fear, and from sin! But, above all, what a joyful thing it must be to the disembodied spirit to have finished its probation, and to have *secured* eternal life; to be no longer exposed to the risk of falling away, and forfeiting the heavenly inheritance! When our hearts are bent upon securing any valuable object upon earth, in the attainment of which there is much uncertainty, what a joyful satisfaction do we feel when all the risk is over, and our object gained! Let this feeling respecting transitory things, lead us to form some notion of that unspeakable joy which the spirits of the righteous must experience in paradise, on finding their eternal salvation secured beyond the possibility of risk! We naturally weep over the graves of the departed. Yet weep not for the departed Christian; weep not for those who "sleep in Jesus;" let your grief be for yourselves, and not for them; they are objects for your envy, rather than your tears. Already they are at *rest* from the labours of their probation; already they begin to taste the *rewards* of eternity, and before them is the bright and certain *prospect of a glorious resurrection*, an approving Judge, and a triumphant admission into heaven.

What reasons have we here to be thankful to Him, who, by exhausting the whole strength of death against himself, deprived it of all power to harm his followers; who converted our penalty

into a privilege, and raised for us a new paradise in the very abodes of darkness. Great was the ruin wrought for us by the first Adam, but greater far the restoration effected by the second. What abundant cause have we then to be grateful to Him, and devoted to his service! What motives to patience and perseverance in well-doing, as also to fortitude in death itself, from the prospect held out to us through Christ of immediate rest and reward! Only let us remember, while we are zealous of good works, that the recompense is entirely "of grace," and not a matter "of debt:" that the sole merit we can plead is not our own, but our Lord's; that it is for his sake we are accepted at all; by his Spirit we are enabled, in any degree, to fulfil the righteousness of the law; by his blood that the stains still attaching to our very best deeds are washed away, so as to make our works capable of any reward hereafter; in a word, that it is only by communion with Him who died for us, that we can hope to lead a holy life, or to die a blessed death.

We have been engaged in the consideration of a most important subject;—the close of one life, and the entrance upon another;—the end of time, the beginning of eternity;—a subject clearly of the most momentous consequence, and that to every one. For who is there who must not die?

It is a subject too which human nature cannot of itself view without horror; a subject, blended with our most melancholy and painful associations. Yet this subject, guided by Scripture, I have endeavoured to place before you, not only in a less awful, but even in an attractive and encouraging light. It is the glory of the Gospel, that our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed over the last and greatest of our enemies, Death; and obtained a similar triumph eventually for his faithful followers. No religion, but that of the Redeemer, can justly pronounce a blessing upon the dead. It is He alone who hath deprived the scorpion Death of that envenomed sting, which must otherwise have poisoned, with the very anticipation of our end, the peace of this life, and have destroyed us irrecoverably in another.

I appeal to yourselves, my brethren, if you are not afraid of death, and averse from the very thought of it? Do you not endeavour to *forget* that you must die, and practically to *disbelieve* it? And whence arises this fatal course of proceeding? From many causes, doubtless; from a love of the world, from the influence of example, from the force of habits long indulged in; but often too, I cannot but believe, from ignorance or thoughtlessness. You either do not know, or you will not consider, how blessed a thing it is to die in the Lord, to die the death of the righteous, and to have your latter end like his.

Otherwise, you would not turn away from the subject with so much dislike and aversion, with so much pain and horror. Christ hath purchased deliverance for you from this bondage in which you are held through fear of death. To the sincere and penitent believer He has divested the subject of all its horrors. And though to human nature there must always be something of pain and awe, in the dissolution of soul and body, in our separation, though but for a time, from the dear objects of our affection, in the departure from a world to which we have been long accustomed, to a world of spirits with which we are unacquainted, yet has Christ abundantly compensated this taste of death's bitterness, by the blessing which he has purchased for men, and which he has promised to those who die in Him. Is it not more desirable to view death in this light, than to regard it with melacholy, and pain, and horror? Is it not better, that what you must do, whether you will or not, you should be able to do with a good hope, and a joyful expectation of *rest*, *reward*, *and glory*, instead of encountering death with terror and dismay, or, what is even worse, with stupid insensibility to its importance? Yet remember the condition. To enjoy the blessedness of dying in the Lord, you must first take care, by the grace of God, that the life, which you now live, you 'live by faith in the Son of God,' 'unspotted by the

pollution which is in the world' from the domineering influence of appetite and passion. If you have hitherto been thoughtless, awake now to a sense of your danger. Remember you *may not* die in the Lord, but incur instead 'the bitter pains of eternal death.' To those, who *are* living unto God through Christ; who *are* daily endeavouring to increase in the knowledge of your Saviour, to grow in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and to do the will of your God; to you, sincere and faithful Christians, how encouraging is the prospect connected with death, which the Scriptures open to you! how animating the assurance, as you strive against sin, that the struggle will soon be over, and that in the world, to which you are going, there will be no sin to combat, no evil spirit to seek your ruin, no wicked world to tempt you by its example, nor yet your own corruptions to betray your souls! There will be no fear of failure there, but a holy rest from trial, and a blissful certainty of everlasting joy. The troubles too which now call for your patience, will then only enhance the sweetness of your repose, and act as a foil to set off the blessedness of that paradise, to which your deaths will introduce you. You will look back upon the evils of this life, partly with wonder that they occasioned you so much pain, partly with joy that you have escaped them, partly with thankfulness that they have been made the instruments of your

purification unto life eternal. Your race will have been run, your warfare accomplished, and the crown, which your Redeemer hath purchased for you, ready to be placed upon your heads at the day of judgment. Only faint not now, in the season of your probation, because of the opposition from within and from without, which you must of necessity encounter: faint not because of trouble, or rebuke, or self-denial; but be "stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" remembering that "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," but that there is indeed, for those who die in Him, a blessed rest remaining, into which the works of the Christian will follow him, to await, for Christ's sake, an exceeding great reward. For have we not heard the 'voice' of divine revelation speaking to us 'from heaven,' and 'saying, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them?'

SERMON IV.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

1 Cor. xv. 20.

But now is Christ risen from the dead.

WHAT a stupendous event is that to which these words refer! "Christ is risen from the dead." We have been so long accustomed to the mention of this fact, as to look upon it without emotion as a mere common-place occurrence. We speak of it as a thing that has taken place; we profess to believe it; nay more, we hold on this day[a] a solemn commemoration of it, as of an event most important to us never to forget: but do we, after all, realize it to our convictions, and feel it in its momentous consequences? Is our "Lord risen indeed?" Did he resume the life which was taken from him upon the cross? Did his soul come back from the place of the departed spirits? Did his body burst the tomb in which it was confined? And did he present himself once more to cheer the hearts of his sorrowing and despairing disciples? Let us go

[a] Easter-day.

back, for a moment, to the season at which these wonderful occurrences took place. Suppose yourselves standing by the cross of Christ. Suppose that you behold him hanging in torture and ignominy between two convicts. Suppose that you hear his enemies deriding him, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Suppose that you hear his own voice crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and see him bow his head and expire. Observe, now that he is dead, how they pierce his side, and behold his admirers embalming his body, to arrest the progress of corruption; then laying him in his sepulchre of stone. Had you been among the disciples of Christ at such a juncture, what, do you imagine, would have been your feelings? would they not have verged towards unbelief, if not sunk into absolute despair?

To the heart of man, influenced so much by things that strike the sense, was it not too natural to be "slow in believing," what the prophets, and even our Lord himself, had spoken of his rising again? Call to mind the case of Cleopas and his companion in their sorrowful walk to Emmaus: the third day, the predicted day of the resurrection, was come; yea, certain women, who were at the sepulchre early that morning, had reported that they could not find the body of Christ, and that a vision of angels had appeared to them, which said that he was alive:

yet what was the impression, after all, produced in their minds? They could only say, with hearts oppressed by doubt, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." They had believed in Jesus of Nazareth; they acknowledged him to have been "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people;" they had gone further; they had received him for the Messiah, and had looked through him for the redemption of Israel. But that he should rise again from the grave, was too great and too joyful a thing to believe, notwithstanding he had promised it. Faith needed here the aid of sense. It was not till they had seen him with their own eyes, that their doubts were removed. The case was similar with the apostles themselves. When the Lord stood in the midst of them for the first time after his resurrection, they for a while believed not for joy. The astonishing event was one too glorious, too happy, for them to realize, until our Lord had condescended to convince them, by visible and tangible proofs, that it was no strange spirit which they saw, but the same Lord whom they had beheld hanging, by his hands and feet, on the ignominious cross.

We, my brethren, have not these means of realizing to ourselves the resurrection of Christ. We cannot, with the doubting apostle, "see in our Lord's hands the print of the nails, and put our finger into the print of the nails, and thrust

our hand into his side." "But blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," that Christ did indeed, as on this day, rise from the dead! Blessed are they who can be thoroughly persuaded of the resurrection of Christ, without the testimony of their own senses; relying upon the report of apostles and prophets, yea, of God himself, by the Holy Ghost, revealing his almighty arm in signs and wonders "for the testimony of Jesus Christ!"

Though we have not seen the wonders of the resurrection, let faith be to us instead of sight, producing the same lively conviction of its realities in our minds, as if we ourselves had felt the "great earthquake," and seen the angel of the Lord descend from heaven, and heard him roll back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and beheld him sitting upon the stone, with a countenance like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. A glorious yet terrible sight, at which the unbelieving sentinels may well tremble and become as dead men. But fear not ye; ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. Come, see the place where the Lord lay: see his grave-clothes lying, and the napkin, that was about his head, wrapped up in a place by itself. But seek not the living among the dead. He is not here; he is risen, as he said. Yea, go to Emmaus, and behold him there breaking bread with his two affectionate disciples: or, behold him, amongst his apostles,

exhibiting the very prints which the nails of his cross had made in his hands and feet, and the wound of the spear in his side; or go to Bethany to witness his ascension in the presence of his disciples to that heaven from which he came.

By meditations like these, let us endeavour to realize to our convictions, to bring home to our minds, the fact, the stupendous yet indisputable fact, of our Lord's resurrection.

But far be it we should rest here. It is well, that we should have a lively persuasion that "the Lord is risen indeed." The more animated our faith, the more likely it is to operate upon our affections, and our principles, to our edification. For let us keep this in mind, that the belief of the resurrection of Christ is full of the most important consequences; to some of which let us now proceed, under God's blessing, to direct our thoughts.

First of all, *the resurrection of Christ authenticates his mission:* it proves him to have been the Messiah or Christ, the destined Lord and Saviour of the world. And hence we justly say, not only that Jesus of Nazareth, but that Christ, is risen from the dead; that "the Lord is risen indeed." This will also explain to us why the apostles insisted so much, in their preaching, upon the resurrection of our Lord; it being the grand proof of the Gospel. Had Jesus not risen,

as he said, how justly might his enemies have repeated their taunts, "He saved others, himself he could not save!" "But now is Christ risen from the dead," and, in so doing, he has put to silence all objections, that could be brought against him from his humiliation and sufferings. He has entered upon his kingdom and his glory, "at the right hand of the majesty in heaven;" "God having highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that every knee should bow before him, and every tongue confess that he is Lord."

Secondly, the resurrection of Christ is as the seal of God to the efficacy of his atonement. It is a proof, that his death has been accepted in heaven, for the justification of us sinful men. It is a triumphant indication of his victory over death, and over him who had the power of death, the devil. Fierce was the struggle on the part of our foe, sore was the pain inflicted by him, when he bruised as it were his conqueror's heel. Severe was the agony of our Deliverer, in accomplishing our redemption: but the awful conflict has given place to a glorious triumph. He "who was delivered because of our offences, has been raised again because of our justification," which he has so fully accomplished for all believing penitents. How consolatory is this reflexion under the sense of our past iniquities! We look

to the cross of Christ, and see the severity of his sufferings. We look to his resurrection, and learn, not only that his sufferings were *great* enough to atone for us, but that the atonement has been *actually accepted*, and recognized before God as the price of our redemption.

In the *third* place, we may view the resurrection of Christ *as connected with his intercession for us* in heaven. He is gone into the holy place; gone to enjoy his own glory, but not to forget his followers. He is passed into the heavens as our great High Priest. He is still carrying on to its completion, as our Advocate and Intercessor, the work of man's salvation, the foundation of which he laid upon the cross. "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." For, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us, he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him."

And what is it that our exalted Saviour intercedes for on our behalf, in order to our salvation? What are the blessings for which we may apply through the all-powerful mediation of his Son? Doubtless every blessing which we are capable of receiving. We must ask every thing in the name of Christ. It is only through his merits that we can hope for any good at the hands of

God. But the chief benefits which we are to look for, are mercy and grace; "mercy," in the pardon of our sins; "grace," to assist us in the time of our need. Those who enjoy these, will inherit salvation. Being justified through the mercy of God, and sanctified by his grace, they will be glorified in that heaven for which they are thus prepared. But this leads us to another important doctrine, connected with the resurrection of Christ; and that is,

The resurrection of ourselves. What! are we also to rise from the grave? The most ignorant amongst my hearers will answer, 'Yes.' "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept:" and in this respect he has fully remedied the consequence of Adam's sin; so that none may complain of being condemned to die finally, except for their own transgressions. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." So that now it is appointed unto all men to die indeed once; but after that to rise to judgment.

What an incentive does this assurance present both to our hopes and to our fears! What a field does it open to human anticipation! As Christ died, and rose again the third day, so we must die, and we must also rise again, at a day appointed in the counsels of God for the judgment

of the world. But what will then follow? Our Lord after his resurrection was exalted to great joy: he ascended into glory. Will this be the necessary consequence with us? What question, my friends, can interest us more deeply? Do not neglect the consideration because it may appear a trite one. Sound and sober religion does not consist in the search after novelty, but in the realizing of well-known truths in such a manner to our faith, as to bring our principles, our dispositions, our tempers, our appetites, our actions, habitually under the control of Christian views and Christian sentiments. True, it is a well-known thing that we are to die; it is equally known that we are to rise again; but is it on this account less important? Is it not a more momentous consideration, precisely for this reason, because it is so universally acknowledged? What then shall become of us after the resurrection? This is the last question to which I would solicit your attention: A question to which I shall endeavour to reply, by considering,

Finally, the connexion between the resurrection of our Lord *and our own resurrection to newness of life.* "For know ye not," as the apostle hath taught us, "that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized unto his death? therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was

raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." The holy sacrament of Baptism, divinely appointed to initiate us into the Christian covenant, bears with it a mystical or emblematic reference to the death and resurrection of Christ, of the benefits of which it makes us partakers. It represents unto us at once our privilege and our profession: *the privilege*, given us by God, in the regenerating grace of his Holy Spirit; and *the profession*, made by ourselves, in our baptismal vows: the one enabling, the other engaging, us to follow the "example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that, as he died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, by continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." Such, according to the Scriptures, and as expressed after them by our Church, is the meaning of our baptism: "ye are buried with Christ in baptism; wherein also ye are raised with him through faith in the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Agreeably to this language of holy writ, our Church teaches us, that the inward and spiritual grace of baptism is "a death unto sin, and a new birth" or resurrection "unto righteousness." It is through the death and resurrection of our Lord, through the merits of

the one, and his intercession consequent upon the other, that we obtain the regenerating power from above "to die from sin," to live in it no longer, but to rise unto righteousness, so as to proceed daily in all virtue and godliness of living. And these blessings, thus achieved for us by Christ, are sealed to us at our initiation into the Christian faith, in the name and by the authority of the ever-blessed Trinity; they are made over to us on the part of God; they are put in our power by a gracious covenant; and the constant endeavour of every baptized Christian should be to hold fast the mercies thus placed within his reach, and not to forfeit them by falling off to unbelief and sin.

Happy those, who, from the first dawn of reason within their breasts, have been taught and disposed to "reckon themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Happy yet few, it is to be feared, are these blessed persons, who have habitually lived according to their baptism, from the time that they first understood its privileges and its obligations. What a different society would the Christian Church be, were Christians, in general, to lead the rest of their lives according to the beginning made in their baptism! Most of us, perhaps, can look back, with sore regret, not only upon days, weeks, or months, but upon whole years of habitual thoughtlessness

on the subject of our Christian calling, and our profession of being made like unto our Lord in his death and resurrection. How deep should be our sorrow for such practical apostacy from Christ! let us grieve, yet not despair, because of our past transgressions. In dependence upon divine grace, let us without delay repent, and now begin, on this blessed day, to shew forth in our hearts and lives that resurrection unto righteousness here, which must of necessity precede the resurrection to glory in heaven. Happily, through the great mercy of God, it is never too late to enter upon newness of life, however dangerous it may be to defer the work a single hour. Let us awake then to a sense of the momentous preparation, which, by God's help, we have to make for our future destination. The resurrection of our Lord is a pledge of our own resurrection to life, but only on condition that we rise to righteousness now. "If, then, ye be risen with Christ," risen already in hope and in profession, "seek those things which are above;" set your affections on that better world "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Live under such an habitual hope of the happy resurrection of your bodies hereafter, as shall, even now, raise your souls from sin to holiness, from carnal things to heavenly objects. Mortify every impure or covetous, every wrathful and malicious, every profane or

deceitful propensity. To these inclinations let us, through the grace of God, become as dead, and alive to every thing that is pure, charitable, pious, and true. So "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory."

SERMON V.

EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

1 PETER ii. 21.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.

DIRECTED by the wisdom and piety of our venerable Church, we have contemplated our blessed Lord dying for us on the ignominious cross; we have been led to his sepulchre, have been told of his resurrection, and have witnessed the incontestable proofs of this triumphant miracle. Thus satisfied of the greatness of the sacrifice made for our sins, and of its acceptance before God in heaven, we are directed, in the offices of to-day[a], to regard our blessed Lord in another relation to us, not only 'as a sacrifice for sin,' but as 'an ensample of godly life.'

He is our *High-priest with God*, to atone for our transgressions, and to intercede for the acceptance of our imperfect services; he is our *King*, to govern and to bless us; he is our

[a] Second Sunday after Easter.

Prophet, to instruct us; and, to leave nothing undone that might promote our salvation, he has himself trodden the path which he bids us pursue, "leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." To this perfect pattern of a pious life, this heavenly model of human duty, let us now direct our attention, praying to Almighty God to enable us so to contemplate the example of his blessed Son, that we may become conformed to it agreeably to the engagements of our Christian profession. "He left us an example," saith St. Peter, "that we should *follow his steps*;" and, adopting the same figure of a journey to our heavenly home, St. John teaches us, that "he that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to *walk even as he walked*." Our Lord has gone before us to heaven, and every one who professes to believe in him, that is, to be a member of his body the Church; every one, in short, who pretends to be a Christian, must follow him, must walk in the same path, must imitate his example.

Through the mercy of God in Christ, we have been restored to the divine favour, and placed in the way that leadeth unto life; the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, is with us to encourage and assist our journey; Christ himself is before us to guide us in the right path, and preserve us from the numberless fallacious guides and ways of error, which entice us continually aside.

As then we are bound to meditate upon the great love of our Lord in dying for us, that we may love him in return with deepest gratitude for our redemption; as we are also called upon to adore his glory as the Son of God, and trust in his power; as we must ever thank him for his Holy Spirit, and confide in his grace; as we must listen to his teaching, and obey his voice; so must we not omit the diligent study of his spotless example, which both Himself and his apostles place before us as our surest guide in the way of righteousness, and the best encouragement we can propose to ourselves under the difficulties and trials of this chequered and imperfect being.

But here I would fain stop. I would refer you to the divine oracles themselves, which alone can do justice to the life of the Son of God. I would exhort you to make *them* your daily study, if you would see how "God manifest in the flesh" did himself act under the various duties and trials, the privations, provocations, and sufferings, to which he vouchsafed to submit. What human hand, not guided by heaven, could attempt a portrait of such unparalleled excellence? To the Gospel itself, as written by the inspired biographers of Christ, and to those notices on the same subject which the sacred Epistles contain, you must have recourse in order to possess your minds with a just idea of your divine

pattern. The language of the Holy Ghost is alone competent to describe the perfect righteousness of our great Redeemer. Human words must needs falter, in despair of reaching the excellence of his life, and in fear, therefore, of derogating from his glory. All I would venture to attempt is to *assist* you, my brethren, in the study of the evangelical history, by furnishing you with a specimen, not a complete method, but a specimen only, of the method in which our Lord's history may be applied to the regulation of our own lives.

But first of all let us observe, that it is not a *literal imitation* of our blessed Lord at which we must aim, but an imitation of his spirit and temper, his views and sentiments, the tenor of his life and conduct[b]. We must remember, that he was the eternal Son of Almighty God, incarnate for man's redemption; that, therefore, his circumstances were, in many respects, eminently peculiar, and his actions *under such circumstances* not to be imitated. For instance, Christ was without fault; he had no sin, nor yet any imperfection, to reproach himself with; he was also omniscient; knew every thing that was passing even in the thoughts of others, and needed not that any should testify to him of what was in man. Accordingly he did not scruple to charge

[b] See Sermon XIX.

the apparently religious Pharisees with the most malignant hypocrisy, notwithstanding all their fair shews of superior sanctity. His all-searching eye penetrated into the true character of this viperous brood; and his holy tongue could, without inconsistency, proclaim their iniquity. But it is not for *us* to arrogate such a knowledge of men's hearts, or to speak as if we were ourselves perfect. If we are called upon (as too often we may be) to rebuke impiety and vice, we must confine ourselves to what we know; we must not pretend to scrutinize the heart. Of that, conscious of our ignorance, we must hope and believe the best we can; and, conscious too of our frailty, our very rebukes must savour of humility, partaking more of brotherly admonition, than of judicial censure. In such instances, then, we must not attempt to imitate, or, more properly speaking, we must not presume to place ourselves on a level with, our Lord. Imitation is still practicable, if it be properly conducted. We may always, after the example of our Saviour, express boldly our condemnation of iniquity, where we really know it to exist, and warn the simple against its dangerous influence, however specious its pretences, or how great soever the false reputation of those who practise it.

With this caution impressed upon our minds, that it is not the precise words and actions of our Lord that we are called upon to imitate,

but his views and sentiments, his spirit and temper, with the general tenour of his life and conduct, that so we may really follow his steps, with the same *mind* in us that was in him, let us proceed to a consideration of some of the leading particulars in the life of Christ, and endeavour to furnish a specimen of the manner in which his history may be applied to the regulation of our own character and conduct. In considering our Lord as our model of excellence, we may begin with the very commencement of his life. Even *his birth*, being a voluntary act of infinite condescension, is an instance well calculated to lead us to humility, and to wean our affections from that love of this world's glory, to which we are naturally so prone. *Our* great object is to stand well with the world: we cannot bear to be overlooked by it, much less to be looked down upon, and to defer our hopes of glory to a brighter and more enduring world than this. Not such were the views, not such the spirit, of our Lord. Though he was 'in the form of God,' and 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God,' but the natural attribute of his divinity as the Son of the Father; yet when he came to save us men, he made himself of no reputation, he emptied himself even of that glory, which he had often assumed in visions to the patriarchs and prophets, of the name too of Jehovah, by which he had revealed

himself to them, and "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man." Had he gone no further, had the Son of God taken our nature upon him under its most exalted circumstances, even this would have been inconceivable condescension. But he stopped not here, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself" to a mean condition, and to an obedience in many lowly and trying particulars, yea, even to death, and that death "the death of the cross." How emphatically are we hence taught the value of earthly grandeur and glory; and the utter inconsistency of pride and vaingloriousness in the followers of Christ! What a total renunciation is here, all at once, of the pomps and vanities of this world! But what! it may be asked, are we all to descend to a similar station in life to that in which our Lord was born? Clearly not. The consequences of such an imitation of our great Exemplar would only be confusion and mischief. For reasons of infinite wisdom, and amongst others to teach vain man humility, the Son of God humbled himself to a very low condition. This in him was an act of his own voluntary choice. But with us it is not our own choice, but the providence of God, that determines our lot; and our duty is, "wherein we are called, therein to abide with God," in the diligent performance of our appointed duties. Still the *same mind* may be in

us which was in Christ Jesus, and this is the great lesson, pressed upon us in Scripture, from the wonderful condescension of our Saviour. Did he decline riches and grandeur and glory? Let our minds not be enamoured of them; but be raised above these fading things. Did he stoop from heaven to save us? Stoop to a poor and laborious lot? Let not us then set our affections on high things, but learn to condescend to men of low estate, to sympathize in their wants and sufferings, and to promote their happiness as Christ has purchased ours. What is the distance between any of us and the meanest of our fellow creatures, compared with the distance between the Son of God and ourselves?

From the miraculous birth of Christ, we proceed to his conduct during *his childhood*. Of this period of his life but little is told. That little, however, is full of instruction. At the age, when the children of the Jews were brought to Jerusalem to be confirmed, we find our blessed Lord accompanying his reputed father and his mother to the passover. In this circumstance, in our Lord's compliance, I mean, with the rite of confirmation, in his attendance at Jerusalem to observe the passover, as also in his subsequent baptism by St. John, and his regular attendance every sabbath-day in the Jewish synagogue, we may observe the strict attention paid by our Lord to the rites and ordinances and communion

of the Church of God; even to those rites which were not strictly of divine appointment, and notwithstanding the corruptions of doctrine which the Scribes and Pharisees had introduced. In vain shall we look to our Saviour's example for any sanction to a disorderly sectarian piety. Every thing he taught and did was quiet, orderly, and sober. Though the Jewish Church, in his time, was so corrupt, he commanded his disciples to listen to and to obey the Scribes, as the regular teachers of religion, occupying in this respect "the seat of Moses." And what he taught others, he practised himself. He was circumcised; he was confirmed; he kept the passover; he sought instruction in the temple from the Jewish doctors; was baptized in Jordan; frequented the synagogue; and thus, by fulfilling all righteousness, positive as well as moral, he has left us an example to do the same; to be equally humble, sober, and subordinate in our religion; to be equally observant of the outward means of grace; equally careful of the unity and order of the Church of God. If superior sanctity or wisdom had been a ground of separation from the communion of the visible Church, who more holy, or more wise, than Christ? Yet he was no separatist; we see no sectarian spirit in his holy example, but a scrupulous adherence to the communion of the Church, at the very time too when the persons

held most in repute were the party of the Pharisees, and those who most opposed his divine mission. We cannot pass over the childhood of our blessed Lord, without remarking the early activity of his piety, and his dutiful obedience to his parents. At twelve years old he stays behind his friends in Jerusalem, in order to gain instruction, in the temple, from God's appointed ministers. What an encouragement is this to parents to train their children in the right way; as also to children, to begin to serve God early; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth; to become acquainted with true religion, before the prejudices of the world take possession of your minds, or evil habits enslave your will! However young you may be, if you are old enough to understand me, I entreat you to listen to what I say; and to give to God your first and most innocent days. I do not wish to make you sad; I do not wish to spoil your innocent enjoyments: no, my young friends, true piety is a cheerful and a happy thing. Lose no time then in making this happiness yours. Samuel ministered to the Lord from his earliest years; your blessed Saviour was found cultivating earnestly the knowledge of God, whilst yet a child; and by his grace you may begin as early to follow his example.

And while you thus learn your duty towards God, remember also that which you owe to your

parents. Even Christ was subject as a child, not only to his virgin mother, but also to her husband Joseph, his reputed father; thereby setting before children an example of dutiful submission to their parents, according to the first commandment to which God Almighty attached a promise, saying, "Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

Of the baptism of our blessed Lord, as shewing his performance of all righteousness, we have already spoken. The next leading event is *his temptation* in the wilderness; a scene of awful and mysterious interest, in which he has taught us, by his blessed example, several important lessons; as, for instance, to deny the appetites of the body when duty requires that we should, to turn a deaf ear to the calls of ambition, and vanity; but chiefly he has taught us this general duty, to resist the devil if we would have him flee from us; to withstand manfully the overtures of temptation, if we would check their violence. And the nature of this resistance must also be after our Lord's example. He resisted the devil by an appeal to the word of God: so must we. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," is the only victorious weapon in this combat. Let us take care then to have our minds rightly informed from Scripture on the great points of our faith and duty; and not only

our minds informed, but our very memories stored with the language of revelation, that we may be ready, on any sudden surprise of temptation, to stay our souls, and to confound our enemies, with the word of God himself. But in this let us also take care, that when we use Scripture we understand it aright; that we cite the sense, as well as the words of revelation; otherwise we are only deceiving ourselves with outward appearances. Satan himself could quote Scripture to pervert it, as he did in the temptation of our Lord; a circumstance which should place us on our guard against an abuse, or careless use, of holy writ, but should by no means deter us from having recourse to the word of God when rightly understood. For what was it that confounded Satan, when he strove to gain his point by a perverse use of the Scriptures? Was it not a right application of the same Scriptures? So let it be with us. Stedfast in an enlightened faith, firmly grounded in a right understanding of God's holy word, our memories richly stored with this divine wisdom, let us be prepared against the various temptations which may assault either our faith or our virtue, encouraged by the example and success of the "Captain of our salvation," who has fought this good fight before us with glorious triumph, "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Here we must pause awhile. It were beyond

our present limits to finish the sketch, which we have ventured to attempt, of the manner in which our Lord's history may be applied to our conduct. Another occasion of resuming the subject may, perhaps, be afforded us. Meanwhile let us reflect upon what we have already considered. Let us remember that the great thing is not to copy literally the words and actions of our Lord (which were presumption); but (which is our bounden duty) to endeavour, by the help of his Holy Spirit, to catch as it were the heavenly temper of Christ, to model ourselves after his sentiments and views and principles of conduct. We can never be in the circumstances of our divine Redeemer. The events of our lives can scarcely ever resemble his: but, by his grace, our frame of mind may become, in some small degree, like that of our Lord. With this hope let us remember the infinite condescension of the Saviour, in his incarnation of the Virgin Mary, and all the circumstances of humiliation which attended it; and let this recollection restrain in us that tendency to pride, that overweening contempt of our inferiors, that fond attachment to this world's wealth and glory, to which our corrupt nature is so much inclined. When our blessed Redeemer chose a stable to receive him, instead of a palace, he stamped for ever upon this world the character of "Vanity, vanity;" yes, "all is vanity," compared with that world to

which he came to restore us. When the Son of God "bowed his own heavens and came down" to visit the sons of men, he taught them, in a language more overpowering than the loudest rhetoric, the folly of human pride, the wickedness of man's contempt for his brother.

Then see him a humble child, submitting reverently to his parents, attending devoutly upon God, and learn ye children at once the hatefulness of disobedience towards your parents, and the beauty of early piety towards your Maker.

Let us next behold Him, my brethren, though the medium of all grace himself, yet scrupulously using all the means of grace; and though Lord of the Church, yet submitting punctually to all its ordinances. And shall we, infinitely poor compared with Him in holiness or wisdom, either neglect the sacraments or ordinances of the Church of God; or, elated with self-conceit of our spiritual superiority, despise her communion? Has not our Lord and Master set us in this respect an example of fervent, yet sober and humble piety, which it ill-becomes his frail followers to forget?

Lastly, we have considered the temptation of our Lord, and have learnt from it to resist the temptations which may befall ourselves, armed with God's infallible word, and animated by the success of Christ before us. Having overcome

the enemy of our salvation, he has opened the path of victory to all who will follow the steps of his pious example. Under the influence of his Holy Spirit, let us strive to imitate Him in his superiority over appetite, in his heavenly-mindedness, his unostentatious humility, his faith in God's word, and he will make us also partakers of his triumph that we may be able to "withstand in the evil day," and having overcome all our temptations, to inherit that crown of a glorified life in heaven, which our Lord has promised to those who follow sincerely, though imperfectly, his steps upon earth.

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ness brought to a close, than our blessed Lord entered upon the active discharge of that work which he had undertaken to perform for the salvation of us men. "From that time he began to preach," and to confirm his preaching by the stupendous miracles, which he wrought daily and hourly. Compared with the common practice of men, our Lord's entrance upon his work may be considered as late. For this delay there are many peculiar reasons which might easily be alleged; and many others, doubtless, with which we are unacquainted. But may we not also learn, from this circumstance, the strict propriety, in every respect, of our Redeemer's conduct? He did not enter upon his ministry until he was of the age, of thirty years, required by the law "for the work of the tabernacle of the congregation." Nor did he then commence his office, without such a calling as should invest him with full authority to discharge it. He had been declared in prophecy, to be "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec;" yea, to be the only "begotten Son of God;" and this title he was prepared to establish by the most overpowering evidence. Still the Son of God, who had been so long before, "called of God, an high priest after the order of Melchisedec," did not enter upon his ministry, until, at his baptism, he was conspicuously marked out and formally appointed by God himself, when "the heaven

was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased." Being thus "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power" from on high, our Lord began to prepare himself, by fasting and prayer and uninterrupted meditation, for his arduous undertaking. But if even "Christ *glorified not himself* to be an high priest" until he was called and anointed of God; if even he *thought a long and severe preparation necessary*, before he began his ministry, what a rebuke is this to those who thrust themselves without a lawful calling into sacred offices, or who, on the other hand, content with being authorized by due authority, neglect that pious preparation of the mind and character which should precede so arduous an undertaking, as that of ministering to the salvation of souls!

No sooner had our Lord received authority from on high to commence his ministry, and solemnly prepared himself for its arduous duties, than his life became a course of uninterrupted *labour*. He had said in the volume of prophecy, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God." And accordingly, in the days of his incarnation, preferring the performance of this promise to the necessary sustenance of his body, "My meat," he would say, "is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." We are taught in

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of the Gospel, have assumed a practical form, they are wrong, or at least defective; and that you are labouring under some strange misconception of the object of divine revelation; as if the Omnipotent had made bare his right arm in mighty signs and wonders, testifying to his blessed word, merely to amuse the speculative, or to disclose to us truths, which it is equally unimportant whether we believe or deny, whether we remember or forget. Arraign not thus the wisdom of the Most High, but establish it in your minds as an undoubted principle in religious matters, that there is no truth which God has revealed, which it is not of consequence for man to know, and which is not calculated, when known, to make him both wiser and better.

And if this is the case with all revealed truth, how much more so with those truths, which relate immediately to God himself! for what is religion, but the dependence of man upon his God? and in what do religions differ one from another, but in the views which they present of God? Hence the abominations of heathenism, its cruelties, absurdities, and vice; because the heathens worshipped gods whom they believed to be vicious, absurd, and cruel. Hence the lukewarmness of the deist; because he acknowledges a deity whom he regards indeed as his Maker and Governor, but whom he has no solid ground to look up to as a reconciled Father,

delighting, through the atoning Son, and the assisting Spirit, in the sincere services of a reclaimed, though fallen creature. From a similar cause proceeds the scrupulous terror of superstition; because the superstitious man thinks of his God only as a severe taskmaster, reaping where he has not sown, and marking with extreme rigour whatever is done amiss. Thus look the world over, and you will find, that the religion of men differs according to the views which they take of God: and herein it is that the peculiarity and excellence of the Gospel consist, that it presents the character of God, and his dealings with mankind, in a light so totally different from what any other religion has attempted; a light so consolatory, so encouraging, and attractive, as is calculated, under divine grace, to overcome our natural aversion to the service of our Maker, to remove our fears, to win us to a cheerful obedience, and to animate us to patient perseverance in that service, which thus becomes perfect freedom.

We are approaching a subject, my brethren, to which neither the pen of an apostle, nor yet the tongues of angels, could do justice,—the character of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as exhibited to us in the Gospel; that combined display of justice and mercy, of grace and truth, of righteousness and peace, of wisdom and power, which beams forth in the religion of

Christ, which illumines earth with some faint gleams of its effulgence; and which shall, through all eternity, fill heaven with its glory. Yet this subject so incomprehensibly mysterious, this light which angels cannot behold undazzled, we are called upon to contemplate, though it be but "through a glass darkly," that beholding, even in this imperfect manner, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," we may become by degrees conformed to its brightness, excellence, and purity, and agreeably to the apostle's language, "may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is by the contemplation of heavenly truth, that the soul becomes, under the operation of the Holy Spirit, a partaker of its reviving and purifying light. And though our views in this life will ever continue imperfect and comparatively dark, yet this imperfect knowledge of the divine character and dealings with us is the appointed means, in God's hands, of restoring us from sin, and raising us to glory. The apostolical benediction, proposed as our text on the present occasion, contains a prayer to the God of Christians; to that mysterious Trinity in Unity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose name we are baptized; the Father from whom, the Son through whom, and the Holy Ghost by whom, are all things. There is a Unity and yet a distinction in the Godhead, Three

Persons though but one God. There is a Unity and yet a distinction in the dealings of God with man. The benediction of the apostle is threefold; "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost." Let us consider these blessings separately.

I. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"The Word," who was with God in the beginning, and who was himself God, being at the same time the only-begotten of the Father; this everlasting Word "was made flesh, and dwelt among us," continues the Evangelist, "full of *grace* and truth." He came down from his Father in heaven upon a mission no less gracious than true; pregnant with glad tidings to the fallen race of man. It is meet that the first blessing implored for rebellious man should be the grace of the Redeemer; the favour purchased for us by him, unmerited grace as regards ourselves, but merited abundantly by Christ, and therefore called "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." No creature can have any plea of merit with God; the smallest blessing which the highest archangel enjoys is, properly considered, a favour from the Most High, a deed of his free grace. For what can any created being have, which he has not received from the universal Creator? what worth, of which God is not

originally the Giver? It may please the Almighty to confer gracious promises upon his creatures, and so by entitling them, in a manner, to reward, to invest their services with a kind of merit. But there is no *independent* merit even in the loftiest and purest being among the angelic hosts. If then even *their* services, though free from sin and imperfection, are yet not strictly meritorious in the sight of God, how much less are *ours!* We have not only no merit, but much sin; we have not only not deserved the rich blessings of heaven, but have instead merited a curse; so that in order to make us *even capable of mercies*, an expiation must be made for our offences, a satisfaction offered to divine justice, that so divine blessings may descend upon the heads of sinners. The necessary satisfaction was made by Christ; and hence the grace of God which bringeth salvation to men, with every other blessing in its train, is properly ascribed to the second Person in the holy Trinity. It was on mount Calvary that mercy and truth met together in perfect union, it was there that justice and peace embraced over the cross of the Son of God.

Our very *capability*, then, of mercy, is to be ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ; it is a favour derived to us through him. Without Christ atoning for us by the sacrifice of himself, and mediating continually for us with God, we could have no hope of pardon or peace, nor yet any

enjoyment even of *temporal* blessings, much less any prospect of eternal happiness. If the wicked who do not practically believe in Christ, do yet experience some enjoyments upon earth, even these are to be attributed to the mediation of the Son of God; they are a drop or two from his fulness, to induce the thoughtless and perverse to drink deeper of the gracious cup; they are mercies vouchsafed, for a time, in probation of the rebellious, and in answer to *His* prayers, who intercedes even for the unfruitful tree, that it may have one more trial of his fostering care before it be cut down for ever.

Whatever value then there be in this present life; whatever comfort, or joy, or happiness; let it be remembered, that without the restoration to the divine favour, which was effected for us by Christ, we could not have known even these temporal blessings. It was in virtue of the merits of the promised Seed, in virtue of the atoning sacrifice of 'the Lamb slain,' in the divine purpose, 'from the foundation of the world,' that the curse pronounced upon the first transgression was prevented from inflicting upon the earth a universal blight, and converting it at once into a habitation of universal misery: so that we are not without reason commanded by the apostle to "give thanks always *for all things* unto God, even the Father, *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

And if, as sinners, we are unworthy to enjoy even earthly blessings, until restored to the divine favour through "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," how much more unworthy are we of *spiritual* and eternal mercies! Our enjoyment of the privileges and benefits of the Gospel dispensation is emphatically called "a state of grace, into which we have access through Christ," and to which we have no previous title from any meritorious services of our own[a]. It was "not by works of righteousness which we had done," that we became children of God; but it was "according to his own mercy that God saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his *grace*, we should be made heirs, according to hope, of eternal life." In this passage of holy writ, our admission to be partakers in the blessings of salvation and the hope of eternal life, is clearly represented as a favour or act of grace, derived to us through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is in all good things, and especially in those of a spiritual nature, the Mediator between God and man, our Advocate with the Father, and great High Priest, through whom alone we can "come boldly to the throne of grace," with a sure expectation of finding mercy.

[a] Rom. v. 2.

The first part, then, of the apostolic benediction may be said to imply a prayer to the Son of God, to make us partakers in the benefits of that gracious scheme of atonement and intercession, whereby he has procured our reconciliation to the Father of mercies, and rendered us capable of his favour both in temporal and in spiritual things, both in body and soul, both in earth and in heaven.

II. When restored through our Lord Jesus Christ into the divine favour, we become capable of that *second blessing* pronounced by the apostle, *the love of God.*

The love of God was indeed manifested *towards* us, while we were yet sinners, by the very circumstance that Christ the Son of God died for us. The same divine love extends *towards* all men; for God, as the Psalmist declares, "is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works;" and that not only in regard to present things, the sun, and rain, and fruitful seasons, but also in the higher concerns of the soul: for God gave his Son "to die for all," "to taste death for every man;" it being the divine will "that all should be saved [b]." But although the love of God is thus extended *towards* all men, in willing their salvation, and calling them

[b] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

to repentance, it is *with* those only who comply with his gracious offers, and seek his favour through Jesus Christ. The actual enjoyment of that love, which the Almighty offers to all, depends upon our compliance with the terms upon which it is offered. It is evident, that we cannot actually partake in the love of God, before we are restored to his favour. It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we have access to the love of God; and this most probably is the reason why the former is mentioned first in the apostolic blessing. By nature mankind universally are, in the apostle's language, children of wrath, objects of the divine displeasure; by grace Christians become children of God; and the blessing pronounced upon them, is the love of their heavenly Father. The apostle might have prayed, on behalf of his converts, for health of body, for peace of mind, for their safe preservation through this life, and their happy entrance upon the glories of another. But he sums up these, and more than all these, in mentioning that which is the root and fountain of all good, the love of the Supreme.

In general it is an acceptable thing to us to be beloved by our fellow-creatures, especially by those whom we esteem, and who can, if they will, promote our happiness. But who is there among the children of men, upon whose will and power to make us happy we can fully depend?

The love of our fellow-creatures either is precarious and changeable, or it is fond and foolishly indulgent, or it is too much mixed up with selfish views and feelings, or at best, if constant, wise, and sincere, it is of necessity limited in its means of promoting our welfare, and altogether unable to control those changes and chances to which our happiness is subject. None of these qualities attach to the love of God: it is the love of Him who is unchangeable, and who is not more willing to make us happy, than he is wise to select the best methods, and powerful to make them all work together for our good. To enumerate the different effects of the love of God, would be to mention every blessing of Providence of which we are capable, together with every privilege which we enjoy as heirs of salvation.

III. But there is one preeminent proof of the divine goodness, which is in fact the crown of all the others, and which our text itself presents, *in the third place*, to our particular consideration. This inestimable benefit is *the communion of the Holy Ghost.* Our Saviour, arguing from the love of parents in giving to their children what they consider good for them, assures us, that in like manner, but with infinitely superior love, our "heavenly Father will give good things," and in particular that best of all gifts, "his Holy Spirit, to them that ask him." When reconciled to

God by faith in his blessed Son, we are made partakers of the love of God; and from his love to us, the Holy Ghost the Comforter is given to our prayers. It is this blessed Spirit dwelling "*with* us" in the ordinances of Christ's Church, and "working *in* us to will and to do that which is good," that enables us to continue in the grace of Christ, and preserves us from forfeiting the favour of our heavenly Father. As the love of God is the fountain, and the mediation of Christ the meritorious ground, so the communion of the Holy Ghost is the operating cause, of our salvation. It is this blessed Spirit who gives us the first principle of a Christian life in our regeneration; it is the same Spirit who enables us to believe in Christ, and from the heart to call him Lord; it is he that inspires us with the love of God, and writes his laws upon our hearts; it is he who when we faint encourages us; who in trouble comforts us; who even when we fall restores us, and establishes us once more in the possession of a clean heart and a right spirit: in a word, the Holy Ghost is the invisible Guide and Governor, the Comforter and Sanctifier, of the Church of Christ in general, and of all sincere Christians in particular: whatever truly good dispositions or habits are found amongst them, are to be ascribed mainly to his influence, and to be reckoned as "fruits of the Spirit." "All goodness, righteousness, and truth," are his work.

Man cooperates; and man's willing cooperation is indispensable; but the power is from above; the "sufficiency is from God" the Holy Ghost.

We may now see how important it is to believe the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity; how necessary to true religion that we should perceive and acknowledge our obligations to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and our dependence upon each mysterious Person in the divine Unity. It is no subject of mere speculation, which has been proposed to you; but one fraught with practical importance; one calculated to inspire you with gratitude towards your God, with love and confidence, and deep yet filial reverence. Forsake not, then, the faith in which you have been baptized; lay it not by as useless or unimportant, but earnestly contend for it, as a subject of the most serious consequence to your religion; as one, upon your view of which the whole character of your piety must depend. Philosophy, falsely so called, may deny the doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity, which is true wisdom, cannot exist without it. Be stedfast, then, in the profession of the truth; be diligent in the practical application of it. It is this which will enable you to experience and to appreciate its value.

Finally, my brethren, if the high, and holy, and mysterious Trinity is thus concerned in our

well-being; if the Son died and ever pleads for us; if the Father makes us objects of his love; and the Holy Spirit deigns to dwell, not only with us, but in us, how powerfully should this consideration call forth our own endeavours to work out our salvation under such auspices, that we may not receive the grace of Christ in vain, nor forfeit the love of God, nor grieve the Holy Spirit to leave us to ourselves; but may continue in the profession and under the practical influence of this faith, until we join those blessed beings above, who incessantly adore the mysterious Trinity, the thrice holy Lord God of Hosts.

SERMON VIII.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL.

COL. i. 23.

And be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

BY hope we mean the expectation of some future good. In this its general sense, hope is natural to all men. The want of hope, we consider to be a mark of that state of lasting misery, which is the lot of the fallen angels. To them "hope never comes, that comes to all." For ourselves in particular, we know by experience, how much we live under the influence of hope. It is this which animates us in danger, which encourages us in toil, which supports us in trouble. So strong indeed is our inclination to hope, that we are constantly overlooking present things, and passing on to something *future*. Even when we are happy, we can scarcely pause to enjoy our happiness, but are ever pressing forward in quest of something still beyond, which is to make us happier than we are at present. Should this point be attained, we do the same.

The future still attracts us; the present, however pleasurable, fails to rivet our affections. Man never *is* blest, but is always *hoping* to be so.

Now what does this teach us? Is it not that man is really made for the future, and in some way or other intended to live *by hope;* that present things are unable to give him entire satisfaction, and that his eye should be continually directed to things to come? It is true that the hope of the world is a restless, uncertain, and unsatisfying thing. It leads the thoughts from one object to another object; which, when it arrives, proves equally a disappointment. It has no point where it fixes, no object in which it rests at last. But, surely, there is some such point? The hopes of this world may be delusive, if trusted to for full satisfaction; but *the hope of the Gospel* must be different. That must be sufficient to satisfy and fill and fix this longing after the future, this craving for things to come, which we find so strong within, so prevalent around us.

What then is that future good to which the hope of our religion directs our view? When the Christian experiences disappointment in his earthly pursuits; when he finds that most things here below have a great mixture of bitterness in them; and that none of the enjoyments of this world, however attractive at a distance, can give him entire and unmingled satisfaction; that at

best they are liable to interruption, and must one day terminate: when thus, without any excess of melancholy or thankless despondency, he yet feels that this life affords no perfect or lasting happiness, to what does the Christian extend his hopes? Where do his thoughts find ultimate repose? The answer is brief and obvious. Each one of you will be able to reply, that 'the hope of the Gospel' is *eternal life;* two short words, soon uttered, and soon forgotten, but how full of meaning! Who can fathom the depth of their real import? Who can tell what it is really *to live,* and to live *for ever?*

At present we live but in part. A gross body encumbers the activity of the soul, and makes it to be but half alive. Much of our time is consumed in sleep; which is but a kind of death, in which we lie buried every night, and from which we rise again to a new life every morning. Thus a fourth part of human existence, and in many cases much more, must be taken away from life, and counted as nothing. How much again, even in our waking hours, do we lose in inactivity! how frequently do bodily infirmities or fatigue deprive us of the power of exerting ourselves, and throw a kind of fetter over our existence! how little, in short, do we employ in that active and free, yet unwearied, exercise of our powers, which alone is living! But this is not all. Our life is stolen from us by sleep; it is lost in trifles, it is

fettered by infirmities, it is weighed down by toil and trouble; and there is yet an enemy worse than all these. It would be something, if, after all the deductions I have mentioned, we could employ the remainder of our time truly in *living*. We might then be so far happy. But here comes in that worse enemy than all; and that enemy is *Sin*.

To pass our hours in sin is not really to live: whatever portion of our time is thus employed, is rather to be called *death*, than *life*. The future state of the wicked is called in Scripture the second *death*. Yet we know that in that state the wicked will not cease to *be*. They will still exist; but inasmuch as it will be an existence in misery and sin, it is called not life, but death. Like unto this death, and introductory to it, is the life of sin upon earth; and as such it also is to be considered rather a death than a life. Hence the Scripture speaks of men being '*dead* in sins;' it tells us that they who live in pleasure, are '*dead* while they live;' and it calls out to the sinner, "Awake thou that sleepeth, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

How little then can we, prone as we are to sin, and hindered, even the best among us, by many corruptions—how little can we judge what it is really to live! If indeed we pass our time habitually in sin, may it not be said of us, as it is said

in the book of Revelations of the Church of Sardis, "thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead?" For in name alone does the sinner live, in reality he is dead. The curse which was denounced against our first parents, that they should die on the very day in which they should eat of the forbidden fruit, was so far executed immediately, that they became *dead in sin.* And in this state every unrenewed descendant of Adam still continues. Nay, even those who have been 'renewed by the Holy Ghost,' and 'quickened through Jesus Christ,' yet in as far as they still partake of sin, partake also of the spiritual death. Such then is the state of man in this present world; at the worst, how deplorable! at the best, how imperfect! some altogether 'dead in trespasses and sins,' others living, but only in part, still struggling with many a lingering propensity to evil, having too frequent and just an occasion to adopt the exclamation, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

For the miseries and evils of mankind, by whatever cause occasioned, Christianity supplies a remedy. At present, we know not really what it is to live: but the Gospel offers us 'life,' and that 'eternal.' This is its great promise, its leading hope; the gift of God through Jesus Christ. To him who is as yet quite "dead in trespasses and sins," Christianity offers 'life.' It

offers to cancel the guilt of his sin, to deliver him from its power, to quicken him by the Spirit of Christ, to cause him in short to pass from the death of sin to that life of righteousness, which belongs to him who is justified through the blood, and sanctified by the Spirit, of our Lord. Let us pause for a moment, to view the Christian hope in this light. Let us regard it, not merely as it consoles and animates the *established Christian*, but as it invites and encourages the *captive sinner*. Art thou "dead in trespasses and sins?" dost thou feel thyself unwilling to live as thou knowest thou shouldest live, and preferring rather "the things of the flesh," to "the things of the spirit;" the objects of time and sense, to those of faith and of eternity? Dost thou know too, that if thou continuest to "live after the flesh, thou shalt die," and that there is no hope of life, unless through the Spirit thou dost "mortify the deeds of the body?" Nay, dost thou feel that to exist only for the present world, to set thy affections upon it, or, as it is called in Scripture, "to be carnally minded is death" already, whilst on the other hand, thou art taught that "to be spiritually minded is" even now "life and peace?" Are these thy feelings and thy sentiments, and art thou ready to cry for deliverance from "this body of death?" Then despair not, though thou art spiritually *dead*. To thee is the hope of *life* offered. God promises to receive into favour

those who turn to Him through Jesus Christ, and to "put his Spirit in them that they may have life." Let this promise support and encourage thee, until thou findest it gradually realized. Strive in *hope* of success to live the life of God; and doubt not but that strength will come with the endeavour.

To produce this *struggle against sin*, is the first office of Christian hope. Those who despair will not attempt to resist sin. They find the force of desire strong, of habit still stronger; and supposing that they have gone too far to be pardoned, and that it is now too late to recover themselves, they unfurl their sails to the gusts of passion, and, letting go the helm of conscience, rush on to make shipwreck of their religion with its present treasures, and its future prospects. But this is a ruinous delusion, from which it is the part of those who preach the Gospel to awaken such as are going on thus recklessly to their own destruction. *Christianity gives up no case as desperate.* It invites all to receive its blessings. It sends forth its messengers in every direction, to bring to the feast "the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind," nay, "to go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in," that the house of the Lord may be filled, though the guests should be helpless individuals, without any previous qualifications to recommend them. To all does Chris-

tianity hold out the same hopes of recovery and life, if they will repent and believe the Gospel unfeignedly. It assures the most habitual sinner, that "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin," and that the Holy Spirit is given to all who will pray for his assistance. None are allowed to despair, none left without hope. If any complain "I am ignorant, sin hath darkened my mind," the Scriptures reply, "Awake, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." If any say, "My feelings are dead, my heart is hardened, so that I cannot repent however desirous I may be;" the Bible promises to give to such "a new heart, and to put a new spirit within them, to take the stony heart out of their flesh, and to give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in the statutes and ordinances of God, and be his people." If again we say we are too weak, even were we willing, to obey; the apostle encourages us with the assurance, that as we have a holy High Priest, who has atoned for our sins, and intercedes for us with God, we may come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain help in all time of our need. Let nothing in short make you despair, unless it be your own wilful determination to persist in your own ways, rather than to embrace the way of life, which lies open before you. Those indeed who will "reject the counsel of God towards them," must prepare to meet him in wrath, not as the God of

love, but as "a consuming fire." But besides ourselves, there is no other obstacle to our salvation; no other reason to despair, except wilful and inexcusable obstinacy. If we really desire life, and would gladly embrace it, should it be in our power, then let us not despair, but with good hope let us strive to enter at the strait gate of repentance, and to pursue the narrow way of faith and obedience, which leadeth unto life. For if, with a true faith in the Gospel, we repent of our past sins, them Christ will atone for; our ignorance, his word and his Spirit will enlighten; our corrupt inclinations, his grace will enable us to subdue; our weakness, his might will strengthen.

Having thus seen the influence of Christian hope in bringing sinners into the way of life, by the assurance which it gives of success to honest and humble endeavours; let us proceed to consider further the effects of the same divine principle upon those who are already pursuing the right and living way. We strive to forsake our sins, encouraged by the hope of pardon, and direction, and succour, from above. This seems to be the manner in which hope first influences the Christian character. It is the expectation rather of pardon than of heaven; connected more perhaps with the dread of punishment, than with the desire of glory. But however this be, as the Christian advances, his

affections become purified and raised, and he begins to desire that heavenly happiness for which the habitual sinner can have no relish. His hope now becomes *full of glory*. He not only looks for escape from punishment through reconciliation with his God, not only for deliverance from the burthen of his sins through sanctification of the Holy Spirit, but extends his view beyond to eternity, and raises it up to heaven. The life everlasting becomes the object of his hopes—that life, which beginning here in weakness, is perfected above in glory; which struggling now with sin, will then be made like unto Christ, holy and undefiled, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;"—that life, which, subjected now to sorrow, is crowned with joy above; which, encumbered upon earth by a frail and perishing body, will then put on incorruption and immortality.

How beautifully does this hope exemplify itself in the character of the apostles, as displayed in their divine Epistles! How constantly do we find their views directed beyond this being to the second advent of Christ, when He shall come again to judge the world, and to reward his obedient though imperfect disciples! It is from such expectations that we find them deriving their chief and almost their only comforts and encouragements, together with some of the leading principles of their conduct.

In the *first* place, *hope* taught them *patience*. Were they afflicted? They did not sink beneath the burthen; but rejoiced instead that they were counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ, "reckoning that their light afflictions which were" comparatively "but for a moment, would work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Hope made them rejoice in the Lord, to whose service they had devoted themselves; it made them rejoice evermore, even when their troubles were greatest; it made them rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

Secondly, from hope the apostles learned *contentment*. They considered that the fashion of this world passeth away; and that, therefore, they that use this world should use it with moderation, without abusing it to the neglect of higher things, and learn in every state to be content; looking to a far better country as their home, and to that city of the living God, which hath foundations unlike to those which are laid by the hands of men. The only way to be really satisfied with our lot, and in whatever state we are to be content, is to be persuaded that the satisfactions of this present life are not the good things designed for the Christian; that *they*, in fact, to them who love God, are but a slight foretaste of incalculable blessings reserved for the next be-

ing;—a drop or two from those rivers of joy, which are at the right hand of God, where Christ sitteth, in whom our life is hid with God.

Thirdly, hope produces *purity*. The Christian looks to be made like to his Redeemer hereafter in glory; he therefore studies to resemble him now in holiness. "He," saith St. John, "that hath this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as He is pure." It is but a deceitful hope to expect that our bodies shall be changed hereafter, so as to be like the glorious body of our Lord, unless we make Him our pattern, and seek to be transformed after his image, *now*, in righteousness and true holiness. The body which is polluted by the service of sin upon earth, and which continues so until death, will be destroyed at the coming of Christ, not changed into glory.

Lastly, a genuine Christian hope produces perseverance in *well-doing*. We are taught to believe, that when Christ appears again he will judge all men according to their works; and that although none can claim reward on the ground of merit, as a debt which he is entitled to receive, the righteous will be rewarded abundantly through the mercy and grace of God; and that, in proportion to their holiness upon earth. Hence St. Paul encourages us to "*abound in the work of the Lord*," assuring us that our "la-

bour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Nay, our Lord himself teaches us, in the parable of the talents, that he will take a strict, though not severe, account of what we shall have done here, and that he will graciously reward every improvement we make of the talents which he has given us: and to the same effect his beloved disciple exhorts us to "look to ourselves, that we *lose* not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive *a full reward.*" How gracious is this doctrine! that God should not only condescend to pardon our sins, and to receive us into favour, but that he should even vouchsafe to reward those very works, which owe all that is good in them to his grace, and which, at the best, are still sullied by the imperfections of our corrupted nature.

Such are the effects of Christian hope, to encourage the sinner to repentance and holiness, to support the Christian amidst the troubles of life, to give him contentment, to preserve him from impurity, to rouse him to activity in well-doing.

Let us try our hope by these proofs. Are we passed from death unto life? from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness? Are we *patient* from the hope of glory? Are we *contented* with the present appointments of God's providence, because we know that better things

are in store for pious Christians; God having prepared for those who love him, joys which pass man's understanding? Again, does the hope of being like unto Christ hereafter, impel us to imitate him now in personal *purity?* and does it animate us to *do good*, as he did? May we ask these questions seriously, and answer them faithfully! that we may know, in truth, whether we have or have not the hope of Christians. Without it, how poor are our best enjoyments! with it, how light comparatively are our heaviest afflictions!

Who would willingly forfeit so valuable a hope, the effects of which are so salutary, especially when our continuing under its influence is made a condition of our participation in the benefits of our Saviour's death: for "if you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel," then, according to the apostle's doctrine, may you look to be reckoned among those whom the Son of God "hath reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present them holy, and unblameable, and unreprovable in his sight."

SERMON IX.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

1 Cor. xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

THE Christian character is summed up by St. Paul under three heads, faith, hope, and charity. These are its *abiding graces;* equally necessary in all Christians, and in every age. The Church has had other endowments besides: she has possessed the power of miracles, the gift of tongues, and the privilege of immediate revelation from the great omniscient God. But these have 'ceased.' The things which 'abide,' as always necessary to salvation, and as ever within the reach of our endeavours and our prayers, though full of weight and meaning, are capable of being reduced under a very brief description. "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three." These are all of an 'abiding' or enduring character; necessary not only to the first establishment of the Christian Church, but to her very existence in a sound

state ever after. Until the earth itself shall pass away, and time shall be no more, the necessity of faith, hope, and love, shall still continue.

"But the greatest of these is charity." They are all indispensable graces, but not all equal. Faith and hope, though they never cease to be necessary in the "Church militant here in earth," will no longer have any being when she becomes triumphant in heaven. She will then behold what is now *invisible*, and possess what is now *future*. Faith will give place to perfect knowledge; hope to actual enjoyment. But charity is not destined to a mortal existence. Her career will not terminate with the grave. She will accompany the Christian through his trying journey in the flesh, and will ascend with him to glory. Heaven is the abode of love: the spirits of the just will doubtless continue to love each other, and to love God, in their state of perfection; the angels cannot but entertain towards one another the love of harmony, and that of adoration towards their Almighty Father; our blessed Lord will never cease to love those for whom he died; and of the Father we are told expressly, that "God is love." He fills the earth with overwhelming proofs of his unspeakable loving-kindness; and in heaven, where he is seen as he is, the display of this attractive attribute will be more immediate, and therefore, without question, infinitely more glorious. Thus is

charity or love (for the words have the same meaning in Scripture) the most enduring of all graces, the only immortal part of the Christian character. Faith will cease; and so will hope; *they* will end with our life below; but charity abideth for ever, both here and in heaven. In the sense, then, just explained, charity is the greatest, as being the *most enduring* of the three Christian graces. It is also greater, inasmuch as it is the *end* of the other two; the maturity of the Christian life; the perfection of piety. We begin with believing the Gospel to be true; this is *faith:* we go on and find not only that it is true in general, but that it brings with it salvation to ourselves; that it opens a door of deliverance from sin at present, and of admission hereafter into glory; this is *hope:* we end in gratitude to God for these unspeakable mercies, and in a desire to imitate his loving-kindness to us by shewing benevolence in our turn to our neighbour; this is *charity:* and it is not until we have attained to such a pitch of piety that we are mature Christians. True it is, that the Christian graces are so interwoven together, so much one in principle and in spirit, and also so much the fruit of the same divine influence, that where one exists in sincerity, the others cannot be entirely wanting. But although faith, hope, and charity, be inseparably united, we may easily distinguish them from each other, when we wish to make

any one our particular study for a time; and we may even observe so far a progress in the Christian character, from one to the other, that one is less common in the young, than it is in the long established, Christian; and that in this sense, as in the other, charity is the greatest of the three, as being the latest in general to which Christians attain at all satisfactorily, the last link in this golden chain. How often do we observe great earnestness in the faith, joined with a sincere looking forward to a better world, yet comparatively how little devotion towards God, how little benevolence towards man!

If charity then be the greatest of the three Christian virtues, you will not wonder to find it so much spoken of and insisted upon in Scripture, nor will you regret the present occasion of making it in a peculiar manner the subject of your thoughts, your desires, your endeavours, and your prayers.

Charity we have seen is the greatest of the Christian graces: but charity in itself is *twofold*, consisting of love to God, as well as towards man. It may seem strange to give this meaning to the word charity, and especially as in the chapter from which my text is taken, St. Paul is evidently speaking of love to man, rather than towards God. Still the word here translated charity, is exactly the same with that, which in other parts is applied to the love of God; and as

this is the source of all disinterested love to man, there can be no doubt that it is included in that grace of which St. Paul speaks so highly. In the present discourse, therefore, I shall confine myself to this meaning of the word, and endeavour with the divine aid and blessing to place before you,

I. *The fact;* that it is a part of Christian duty to love God.

II. The *reasons* why it is so.

III. The *manner* in which love to God is shewn.

I. We are to observe *the fact; that it is a part of Christian duty to love God.* Under the Law, piety was most frequently described as "*the fear* of the Lord;" the Mosaic being a less spiritual and exalted dispensation than the Christian. Still even Moses commanded the Israelites to love the Lord, with all the heart, and soul, and might; and in some favoured instances under the elder economy, this seems to have been the prevailing principle of piety. The Psalms, for instance, abound in expressions of that gratitude to God, and that affiance in his loving-kindness, which are so intimately connected with a love of his name. It was, however, reserved for the Gospel, to bring this principle more prominently forward; to present to us the name of God under a more attractive form than had ever been revealed be-

fore; to exhibit it in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, "*full of grace*, as well as of truth;" to give to us, in the work of redemption, such unspeakable proofs of God's goodness and mercy, and love towards us, as should furnish the strongest motives to love him in return. And lest our own corruption should render all this unavailable, by refusing to be drawn "with cords of a man," even "with bands of love," God has given us his Holy Spirit to open our hearts to a sense of his mercies and a delight in his service. Accordingly you will find the distinguishing mark of Christians, as they are described in the New Testament, to be that they "love God," or, which is the same, that they "love Christ," who is the Son of God, and is God, One with the Father. "Eye hath not seen," saith St. Paul, "nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared"—for whom?—"*for them that love Him.*" Again, "if any man *love not the Lord Jesus Christ*, let him be anathema maranatha," that is to say, "accursed at his coming." It was *the love of Christ*, the apostle declares, that constrained him to labour and suffer as he did. Thus too St. James teaches us, that the crown of life and the kingdom of heaven are promised to them *that love God.* These then are the true heirs of immortality; all others, however they may be satisfied with themselves, however loud

in the profession of faith, or confident in their hopes, yet if destitute of sincere love to God, will find, at last, their hopes a delusion, and their faith a dead letter, when the Lord cometh, according to the apostolic warning, to execute the anathema, even the curse of final condemnation, upon those who have not loved him. This is an awful doctrine; but it is evidently the doctrine of Scripture, and also of reason; for nothing surely is more reasonable, than that we should love that Being who is in himself so excellent, and towards us so good.

Examine yourself then, I pray you, by this doctrine. You will be judged by it, when our Lord Jesus Christ appears. The enquiry which He will make will be how far you have shewn yourselves by your works to have had a sincere love towards Him. Our wisdom is to "judge ourselves" now, "that we be not condemned of the Lord." Do we then, upon turning our thoughts into our own breasts, find any affections, dispositions, or principles, there, that we can justly entitle "love towards God?" Or do we instead find our hearts occupied by a love of the world, an increasing proneness to the pursuit of pleasure, to the acquisition of worldly shew or prosperity, to the indulgence of our pride in self-complacency, or of our vanity in other men's applause? On what, for instance, are our thoughts habitually fixed? Whither do they spontaneously

tend? Do they ever, of their own accord, rise up to God, as to a gracious Father, with reverential feelings of delight; as to an unspeakable Benefactor, with overflowing thankfulness and praise? This is the spirit of filial love, and it is the spirit of a Christian; is it ours? If we are not conscious of something of this nature; if our thoughts scarcely ever ascend with gladness unto God; if instead they are constantly wandering about, seeking some resting-place in the world around us; how far are we from being thorough Christians! How different is our character from that of "the heirs of the kingdom!" They "love God," and he will graciously receive such children into his immediate presence in heaven. "But if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Make this the test of your character. It is one which, if conscientiously applied, can scarcely fail of leading to a true conclusion. The true Christian loves God; the mere professor of Christianity loves the world. The one is devoted to the will of the Lord; the other to the mere enjoyment of the present life; and the two things are incompatible. "We cannot serve God and Mammon."

If we love the one, we must hate the other. "The friendship of the world is enmity against God: whosoever, therefore, will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God." And what can be more awful than enmity of such a nature?

II. But let us proceed to consider, in the second place, *the reasons why we should love God.*

Love is excited either by the excellence of the object, or by love shewn towards ourselves. Now *God is infinitely excellent.* There is nothing good in the creation, nor lovely, which does not derive its being from Him. Does wisdom attract us? God is infinitely wise. Has virtue any charms? God is infinitely holy and good. And whatever there is of beauty in the material world, is but a faint beam of the spiritual glory of the divine perfections. But man is too corrupt, and his nature perhaps in other respects too imperfect, to love God at present for his own perfections. This is a happiness reserved rather for a higher state of being, when we shall be more like God, and shall *see*[a] Him as He is in the person of his adorable Son, our great Redeemer. The angels enjoy this happiness above, and many Christians, who have made unusual advances in

[a] And therefore the more easily *love* Him. See 1 John iv. 20.

holiness, and brought under their bodies, may have so far some foretaste upon earth of that bliss which they are hereafter to experience, in being favoured with such lively apprehensions of the attributes of God, as in a manner to "see Him who is invisible" as Moses did, and to love Him for his own perfections.

But the more usual motive to the love of God is *His previous love to us*. "We love God," saith St. John, "because he first loved us." We cannot open our eyes without beholding, nor exercise reflection without recollecting, innumerable instances of God's loving-kindness. For "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord; and it endureth continually." There is nothing good which we either have or are, which God has not given us: nothing which we have not received from his bounty. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." Our bodies are formed by his hand; our souls breathed into us by his Spirit; our food, our raiment, our health, our strength, our faculties, whether of mind or body, our friends, our innocent pleasures, our deliverances, our consolations, our preservation, are each and all really from God, by whatever channel they may be conveyed to us. If we consider ourselves thus as the *creatures* of God, we shall find it to be true, that he hath loaded us with benefits. But if we would estimate at all worthily the love of God, we must farther con-

sider ourselves as *sinners*, and think not only of the goodness of God, but of his mercy: for as most abundantly in the blessings of Providence, so above all "in this was manifested the love of God, because that God sent his only-begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins," to be the Saviour of the world, "that we might live through Him, and not perish" everlastingly. Whether we regard the benefit bestowed, or the manner of conveying it, we can imagine nothing equal, nothing comparable with it. The one is life eternal; the other, the ministry of the Son of God. A greater blessing could not have been conferred, than that of everlasting glory; nor can we imagine it conferred in a manner calculated to draw us more forcibly towards God, than by the humiliation and death of the eternal Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. "Greater love hath no man than this, to lay down his life for his friends. Hereby then perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us:" and that not when we were his friends, but sinners against him, even his "enemies by wicked works." It was an abiding remembrance of this unspeakable love of God, that wrought so upon the mind of St. Paul in constraining him to toil and to suffer for the cause of Christ; for he "reckoned that if He died for all, then were all dead: and that he died, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but

unto Him that died for them." He considered the life which Christ had saved as due in gratitude to his service, and as the proper expression of love to so great a Benefactor. But this brings us to the third particular which we proposed to consider; namely,

III. *The manner in which we are to shew our love to our Maker and Redeemer.* Twice has God given us our life: once by creation; this was lost by sin, and God restored it by redemption. The Saviour bought it with his blood. Doubly then are we debtors to devote our lives to the service of God. It was in this way St. Paul reckoned, and in this spirit that he lived. His life was one uninterrupted offering, ever burning before God as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Him."

Those who really love God will doubtless delight in *reverently worshipping* his name. They will not come before Him with irreverent familiarity: they will not speak to their Maker or their Saviour, as they would to a fellow worm. The fear indeed of terror will no longer have a place in the breast of one reconciled to God by faith in the blood of Christ: but the fear of reverence and awe will still remain. God is our Father, and he is in heaven; for both which reasons we should reverence his name, and avoid in our worship of him whatever is light, or

low, or unbecoming. We may delight ourselves in the Lord, yet with feelings of adoration and deep humility. This reverent communion with God, by acts of humble yet fervent devotion, is one way by which the love of his children is shewn. A character without devotion, is a character without love.

Another way of shewing our love to God, is *by obedience*; "by doing his will," by keeping his commandments, by striving to please him. They "that love him and keep his commandments" are joined together in Scripture, as a description of the same character. "If a man love me," our Lord declares, "he will keep my words." If therefore we do not desire and endeavour in all things to do and to submit to the divine will, it is evident that we are not actuated by a sincere love of God. Sin is the object of his hatred; and those who allow themselves in it must be his enemies. The first Epistle general of St. John is peculiarly strong in insisting upon the necessity of loving God; and if you read it carefully, you will find the aged apostle no less urgent respecting the connection between the love of God and the performance of his will. He had probably lived to see the doctrine of divine love abused; to witness pretensions to this holy grace, on the part of worldly and wicked men; he is therefore particularly careful to join

it continually with a spirit of obedience. More especially he insists upon faith in Christ as one of the first of God's commandments, and upon love to man as inseparable from a true love to God[b].

Let us strive then even if we have not the love of God as we could wish in our hearts, at least to shew forth the acts of it in our lives. If we do the one, and accompany our endeavours by prayer and faith, God will doubtless give us the other. The error of many Christians is, that they expect to love God, without any efforts on their parts to *live* as if they loved Him: others again despair of success, because they find all their endeavours in this way unavailing. The one trust to God presumptuously, for what he has not promised; the other neglect to seek what his goodness offers to them. Let our prayers be accompanied by exertion, and our exertions by prayer. For it is the express promise of the Gospel, that we shall be enabled by the Holy Spirit to know the Lord[c]. May we be preserved alike from indolence and from want of faith; and may "the Lord," even the Holy Ghost, "direct our hearts into the love of God," that we may "not be weary of well-

[b] 1 John ii. 3. iii. 23. iv. 20. [c] Heb. viii. 11.

SERMON X.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

1 Cor. xiii. 1.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

PRACTICAL righteousness is summed up by our blessed Lord under two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These two commandments (on which "hang all the law and the prophets") are indeed not only alike, but almost identical, and in practice at least inseparably united. Hence they are both comprised in the language of the New Testament under one common title, Charity or Love. It is however more of love to our neighbour that St. Paul is speaking, in that memorable chapter from

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which our text is taken: and it is to this great branch of Christian righteousness that I would now invite your attention.

The preface which the apostle makes to his description of charity is remarkably solemn. In terms the strongest which even his own energetic eloquence could supply, how forcibly does he inculcate upon us, that whatsoever we do, if without charity, is of no value. Let this then be the first point for our consideration,

1. *That all our doings without charity are nothing worth.*

Observe the splendid accomplishments and actions, intellectual and moral, which the apostle denounces as altogether worthless and unprofitable, unless combined with charity. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." The power of speaking foreign languages without any previous acquaintance with them, was one of those supernatural endowments by which the ministers of the early Christian Church were enabled to disseminate the Gospel, and to bear overwhelming testimony to its truth. So extraordinary an accomplishment was likely to intoxicate its possessors, if not counteracted by the strongest principles of piety. Many among the Corinthians especially were carried away into an extravagant

display of the wonderful gift. To check this disorderly ostentation, St. Paul admonishes his converts, that if to the languages of men they could add those of angels, still without charity, they would only be an unprofitable sound.

As attainments, even miraculous attainments, in language, not accompanied and controlled by charity, are of no value, so are similar attainments in learning and knowledge. A thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures themselves, so as to "understand all the mysteries" of our holy faith, and to possess moreover "all knowledge," religious and moral, would yet be worthless to the possessor, if separated from charity. Even that wonder working faith, that extraordinary confidence in the miraculous interposition of God for the furtherance of the Gospel, with which many of the first Christians were endued, and to which it was promised that nothing should be impossible [a], was, with attainments in language and in knowledge, equally of no value without Christian benevolence. "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

Nay, more than this, the greatest personal sacrifices for the purpose of alms-giving, if car-

[a] Matt. xvii. 20.

ried even to self-impoverishment, yet when done from ostentation, or another motive than charity; or the most ardent zeal extending itself to very martyrdom, yet if not influenced by charity, is of no advantage to the individual himself, whatever benefit may accrue to others. The case is an extreme one, and scarcely ever, one would hope, actually realized. Still the very putting of such a case, shews the incomparable value and indispensable necessity of charity; how inseparable it is from the Christian character, and how infinitely preferable, not only to the highest accomplishments, literary or intellectual, but to the loftiest achievements of that zeal, which, however splendid in its external acts, is stimulated only by vanity or ambition, and destitute of disinterested love to mankind. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Can any language more strongly inculcate "that all our doings without charity are nothing worth;" and "that whosoever liveth" a stranger to this sacred principle, "is counted dead before God?" Surely if an acquaintance with the languages of earth and of heaven; if an insight into all mysteries and all knowledge; if a faith capable of performing the greatest miracles; if an entire sacrifice of property for the use of others; and even a surrender of life itself to the flame of

persecution, are all but as a feather in the balance when weighed against charity; all without charity worthless in the sight of God; if talents and actions so splendid, and capable when well directed of being so eminently useful, are yet nothing without the love of our neighbour; surely, my brethren, there are no other deeds or qualities, no talents that we possess, or actions that we perform, for which we can claim an exemption from the apostolic denunciation, that, if we have not charity, they profit us nothing. Compared with those gifts of which St. Paul speaks, how trifling are the attainments of the scholar or the philosopher, the moralist or the divine! how small too the power of the greatest statesmen or monarchs, in comparison with the efficacy of that miraculous faith, which the missionary of the apostolic Church exerted! And what are the sacrifices made by us in the cause of religion, or in any other cause, when set against the zeal of bestowing all our goods to feed the poor, or giving our bodies to be burned? Yet look to the opinions of mankind in general; consider the comparative estimate which they form of things; and will you find charity holding that rank in their judgment, which it possessed in the apostles? Are we not prone to admire, as if they were the most valuable attainments, those very things, nay, things far inferior to those, which the inspired teacher

declares to be of no value at all without charity? How common is it to see men proud of their scholarship, their philosophy, their learning, their theology; proud of their skill, or power, or influence; proud of their liberality and acts of heroism; and choosing rather to be esteemed by men for any of these distinctions, than to be approved by God for their charity! Nay more, how much of their admiration do Christians bestow upon things quite external to the character, and infinitely below any attainments intellectual or moral! Why else do we see so much time and solicitude expended upon riches, and dress, and equipage, upon personal appearance and elegant accomplishments? Why do these subordinate things so often almost entirely immerse Christians, if it is not that they set an undue value upon them, or are too compliant with the world's admiration of them, and forget meanwhile that "the end of the commandment," the great thing enjoined us by God, is none of these, but "charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned?"

We have seen that in the doctrine of St. Paul, charity is the "most excellent gift," which the Holy Ghost has ever dispensed to the Church of God: far more excellent than those other wonderful gifts which the same blessed Spirit bestowed upon the apostles and their fellow-labourers in the Gospel; yea, so exclusively pre-

eminent, that all other gifts are only so far good, in proportion as they are subordinate and subservient to charity. This divine principle is indeed "the bond of all virtues," or, as it is called in Scripture, "the bond of perfectness." By directing all actions to their proper end and object, the glory of God and the good of man, it unites them, and makes them harmonize together in the formation of the complete Christian character: for "love is the fulfilling of the law;" it directs us to the performance of all our duties both to God and man, constituting that "royal law" of Christ, which teaches universal obedience, which prompts and controls every virtue. Faith is but dead unless it "worketh by love;" and that virtue is but apparent and partial which flows not from this principle. It may be profitable to our neighbour; but it will profit ourselves nothing at the day of judgment, without charity.

II. From the paramount importance and indispensable necessity of charity in the human character, proceed we now to consider, in the second place, *the nature of it* as described by the apostle. The enquiry we have seen is an important one, and never more so perhaps than in the present day. In the Christian Church there always has been, and, it is to be feared, there ever will remain, a diversity of sentiment

on religious subjects, upon those subjects, especially, which are least clear and least essential to salvation; a diversity even among those who are equally conscientious in forming their opinions, if not equally gifted with talents and learning. Under such circumstances it can never be the duty of any Christian to compromise the truth, by acting contrary to his honest conviction of it: for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To sanction opinions or practices which, after humble and fair enquiry, we believe to be unscriptural, or otherwise erroneous, would be to attempt the performance of one duty at the expence of another; it would be to seek a specious union, unsound at the core, and which could only end in the sacrifice of truth, and consistency of character: it would be to act in opposition to the apostolic injunction, "that we should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." How then shall the peace of the Christian world be preserved? and especially in these days, when the liberty of conscience, advocated at the Reformation by the blood of martyrs, has been abused to a degree of licentiousness productive of continual insubordination, disunion, and error? How amidst such differences daily multiplying around us, how shall we preserve the peace of the Church? By 'putting away the helm of conscience,' and so 'making shipwreck of our faith?' No, the "bond of peace" is charity;

even that charity which is not only consistent with, but which actually springs "out of, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned?" "Whence come wars and fightings among us?" Come they not hence, not from right apprehensions of the faith, or too stedfast an attachment to it, but from the evil passions and tempers which warring first within us, break forth at length in angry contention and mutual upbraidings? Let charity take possession of the heart; and peace will be found compatible with the most conscientious love of the truth, and the most consistent adherence to it. Let this principle first bind our passions within us, and it will not fail to prove also the "bond of peace" towards others, however opposed to us in opinion, or even in feeling, without requiring from us a sacrifice of the least iota or tittle of our Lord's commandments.

Let us listen, then, to the words of the apostle; let us study the beautiful picture, which he has drawn, of that most excellent gift of charity, which is the very bond of peace, as of all virtues, so necessary at all times, so peculiarly necessary in the present circumstances of the Church of Christ.

The apostle describes charity by its fruits, or the manner in which it shews itself in our conduct under different circumstances in social life. And, first of all, "charity suffereth long, and is kind." By suffering long, we are evidently to

understand a patient endurance of our neighbour, when his conduct is such, as, either in itself or through our own frailty, to provoke us to anger. It is thus that God shews towards us "long-suffering and goodness," in order to "lead us to repentance," when we provoke him by our sins. And it is thus, when our neighbours imitate *our* conduct towards God in provoking us by offences, that we should imitate the divine dealings *towards us*, by suffering long, and being kind; seeking by this means to bring them to a better spirit, and to heap upon them coals of a holy fire, which, having first kindled in them a sense of shame, shall at length melt their hearts into compunction. For charity not only forbears to revenge an insult or an injury, but is kind to those who have done it. The ambition of the pagan was to be sincere in his friendships, and to be also as sincere in his hatred; to be as much dreaded for the one, as esteemed for the other. And this is not an uncommon maxim with the world even now. The spirit of the world is a spirit of retaliation both in good and in evil. The Christian, on the other hand, is taught by the law, and led by the example, of his Redeemer "to recompense to no man evil for evil;" but "to love even his enemies, to bless them that curse him, to do good to them that despitefully use him and persecute him."

In all cases the charitable man will feel and

act towards his neighbour, as he would feel and act towards himself under the same circumstances. He will put himself in his neighbour's place, and then allow his feelings and actions to flow. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is the principle that controls his sentiments; and the rule which regulates his conduct, that golden precept of our Lord, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Hence it is that the charitable man suffereth long, and is kind: hence also he will not be envious of the attainments or advantages of others; nor will he, on the other hand, vauntingly display his own, or be elated with the possession of them. He will rather rejoice in the excellence of his fellow-Christian, and in exercising his own talents, will study not his own glory, but the good of mankind, endeavouring to make them useful to this end, and not a subject of admiration for his own fame. For "charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not herself; is not puffed up."

So far from indulging in selfish ostentation and an overbearing display, or evincing in any way a contempt of his neighbour, the charitable man will conduct himself not only without envy, and with modesty, but even with a delicate and tender respect for the character and feelings of others, it may be for their very prejudices and infirmities, cultivating from a principle of bene-

volence that delicacy and decorous propriety of conduct, on which so much of the comfort and satisfaction, nay, so much even of the peace and purity, of social intercourse depend. "Charity doth not behave herself unseemly." She is humble, though not mean, in her deportment; whilst free from austerity, she never forgets, in word or deed, the limits which modesty and the strictest purity prescribe.

Moreover charity is *disinterested;* not selfishly absorbed in the pursuits of her own advantage; but ever mindful of the happiness of others, "ready to distribute" to their necessities, and "willing to communicate" according as God hath prospered her. For although almsgiving is not charity, however confounded with it in common language; and although we may give all our goods to feed the poor, yet not do it from a charitable motive; still the charitable man will always be disposed, according to his power, to assist and relieve those who deserve it; and he who lays claim to charity, without possessing a liberality proportioned to his means, is deceived, and thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think. For "charity seeketh not her own," but the common good.

She is meek too, and therefore "not easily provoked;" is candid, and free from suspicion; so that where no evil presents itself to the observation, she "thinketh" none. Her lips she

keeps from the taint of slander and misrepresentation; nor will she take a malicious pleasure in an injury done to the character of any, but will delight to speak the truth to the advantage even of an enemy. For she "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

Another feature of charity is, that she "beareth all things," or, as the words in the original more probably mean, the charitable man exercises in all things a self-denying *constraint* over himself, forbearing to indulge his own feelings or opinions, and sometimes even to enforce his rights, when the harmony and peace of society so require it.

Finally, the charitable man "believeth," or, where he cannot believe, he at least "hopeth, all things," to the advantage of others. If at the same time he meets himself with a treatment the reverse of all this from others, he patiently submits to it, as indeed to whatever else it may be necessary for him to bear for the sake of doing good. For "charity believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things."

Such is Christian charity as described by the pen of an apostle, a constellation of the fairest virtues, both active and passive; at once forgiving and kind; free from envy, ostentation, and pride; delicate and decorous in behaviour; disinterested, meek, and candid; ever ready to do justice to the character of her neighbour, to sub-

mit to self-control for his good, to hail with gladness any indications or even hopes in his favour, and patiently to endure whatever sufferings she may meet with in her course of benevolence.

It is this grace, my brethren, that we have this day been called upon most solemnly in the words of holy writ to cultivate as an indispensable part of the Christian character. No man likes to be thought uncharitable. But let us measure ourselves by the apostle's standard, and judge if our charity is such as he describes. It is this alone which never faileth; but abideth for ever, even when faith and hope shall have ceased. Let us form ourselves then upon this model, drawn by the apostle from that preeminent pattern of infinite charity, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was from this original the Apostle copied, it is to the same bright Exemplar that we also must look: we must look to Jesus, and that not only for guidance, but also for pardon of our past uncharitableness, and for grace to help us now. For let us ever remember, that charity is not the natural growth of the human heart, but the gift of God's Holy Spirit. "Every good gift is from above," and especially this most excellent gift of charity. So fair a plant could never grow of itself in the heart of fallen man. It must be ingrafted there by the Spirit of God, and increase

under his continual blessing: still, in dependence upon Him, we must labour ourselves to cultivate it. We have God's word to direct us, the example of his Son to encourage us, the aid of his Spirit to assist us: so that no difficulties we experience from our own hearts should make us despair of success, if we are but honest and humble in our endeavours to attain it. Were we exhorted to cultivate charity in dependence upon ourselves alone, we might well sit down in despair, and surrender ourselves without a struggle to anger and envy, to ostentation and pride, to selfishness, impatience, suspicion, and the other rugged tempers of uncorrected nature. But happily this is not the case. The Gospel not only describes charity, but bestows it. In the word of God we have the description; from the Spirit of God we have the reality. To Him let us call in the hour of temptation, when our uncharitable propensities rise within us, that he would assist us in the struggle with ourselves, and give us the victory. We shall thus day by day acquire a nearer resemblance to that beautiful picture which the apostle has given us to copy: our uncharitable deformities, though never to be altogether removed in this world, will gradually become less and fewer. And if thus renewed, though but imperfectly, after the image of our blessed Lord, we shall be finally received, through his merits, into those regions, where no

harsh tempers, no angry differences, no mutual jealousies, no evil surmisings, will be any more felt or heard of, but where our harmony will be perfect, and our peace for ever undisturbed.

SERMON XI.

CHRISTIAN PURITY.

MATT. v. 8.

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

HUMAN jurisdiction extends only to the outward conduct; it punishes crime in the overt offence, not in the inward intention. Yet in order to the advancement of piety and virtue, it is desirable to begin at the fountain head, to check evil at its first source, to nip it in the very bud. But this is a prerogative which belongs to God alone: He only knows the heart; therefore He only can give it laws. It is the peculiar excellence of religion, that it can make us thoroughly and sincerely good, by subjecting us to the tribunal of Him, to whom our thoughts and intentions are as well known as our actions, and who therefore "requireth truth in the inward parts." We may gain applause from men, when our hearts shall refuse to join in the commendation. But "if our hearts condemn us, God is

greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." The conscience within us is his monitor, to remind us continually of the account we must give to Him of what we are in deed and in truth, as well as in appearance or profession. No earthly lord could enforce an obedience of this kind. It is our divine Lord alone, who can say with effect, "Blessed are the pure in heart;" it is He only who can exact a service like this. In pursuing the subject, I would invite your attention to the following points, and may God's Holy Spirit assist and bless us in the consideration of them.

I. The necessity of "purity of heart" in order to purity of life.

II. The nature of this duty considered in itself.

III. The difficulty yet blessedness of performing it.

I. We are to consider *the necessity of purity of heart.* We are commanded, in the book of Proverbs, "to keep the *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Here the conduct takes its rise; hence the stream first flows, partaking all along of the character of the spring. To the same effect our Lord teaches us, that it is out of the heart that "evil thoughts", or wicked reasonings against God proceed, together with "murders, adulteries, fornications,

thefts, false witness, blasphemy." If indeed the tree be corrupt, what can you expect of the fruit, but that it should be corrupt too? "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Our actions are but our thoughts and desires ripened into maturity. If then we would be pure in life, we must be careful to avoid all impurity of heart. Sin indulged within, must sooner or later break forth into actual transgression. He who would start *now* from the commission of open offence, yet scruples not to harbour thoughts and desires of evil, knows not on what a precipice he stands. He little thinks how soon his evil desires and thoughts, if not restrained, will acquire strength to break the barriers, within which he at present confines them, and hurry him into conduct of which he now supposes himself incapable. Effectually to prevent open offence, we must check all inclination to it, and flee from the very thought of evil. And as with the prevention of sin, so is it with the cultivation of righteousness. If the tree be suffered to become evil, the fruit will be evil; in like manner, make the tree good, and the fruit will resemble it. Whilst then we would avoid the error of those who place religion only within, by making the state of their hearts, (as they speak,) or more properly, the state of their feelings, opinions, or sentiments, the test of their safety, let us keep in mind the necessity of

watching over our views and principles, our tempers and dispositions, our thoughts and inclinations, nay, over the very desires and imaginations of our hearts. If we place religion only in externals, we are in danger of Pharisaical hypocrisy; if only in inward impulses and feelings, we incur the risk of fanaticism. The Scriptural path is to serve God at once in heart and in life. In truth, where the one is sincerely devoted to God, the other will be also. Hence it is, whilst we are required to give our hearts to God, we are continually reminded that we shall be judged hereafter by our *works:* our habitual conduct will be the best proof of the state of our hearts before God; the fruit will shew the character of the tree; the stream that of the fountain. So necessary is the connection between the heart and life; and therefore so important is it to remember, that if we would lead a good life, we must make it our practice to encourage none but good thoughts, good desires, good feelings, and good propensities. "Blessed," in this respect, "are the pure in heart."

But "purity of heart" is, in itself, a duty, and not merely because the purity of our lives depends so much upon it. It is one of the necessary graces enforced upon us by our Lord, as forming that character which is to inherit blessedness. Let us proceed then to enquire,

II. Into the *nature of this duty* considered in itself.

We have seen already, that the cultivation of what is good must begin in the heart. But what is meant, in particular, by "*purity* of heart?" Are we to understand this purity to be opposed to some one sin in particular? or to every sin? Generally, perhaps, we mean by purity a freedom, more especially, from the sins of sensuality, by which men transgress the virtues of chastity, sobriety, and temperance. And this is a true notion as far as it goes, but not the whole truth. To be pure is to be *free from defilement;* and as *any* sin defiles the heart, it is inconsistent with that purity required in a Christian. Not only sins of appetite, but sins of temper, and sins of the affections, bring a stain of uncleanness upon the character. "Out of the heart," saith our Lord, "proceed evil reasonings, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies; these are the things which *defile* a man." To the same effect St. Paul speaks, when he warns his converts first against the sins of sensuality, then against those of *injustice*, and concludes by comprising both under the general denomination of *uncleanness.* "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupis-

cence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter; because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called you unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." The fallen angels are not only wicked, but unclean spirits. Yet being spirits, they can hardly be supposed capable of sensuality. Their uncleanness consists rather in pride and lying, in malice and revenge, and vices of this malignant character. Do not suppose, my brethren, that I mean for a moment to palliate sins of sensuality, or to lull into fatal repose the conscience of any one who is guilty of them. God forbid I should do any such thing! Your Lord assures you, that "adulteries," and not merely "adulteries" but "fornications" also, "defile a man:" his apostle warns you most solemnly to "abstain from fornication," and "not to live in the lust of concupiscence, as heathens who know not God." He tells you that God is the avenger of such as live in this heathenish manner. If there be any one amongst us who flatters himself that he may live in safety in the irregular indulgence of his appetites, let him once for all be reminded, that his thoughts are not those of a Christian. Let him but take up the New Testament, and he will find himself condemned in almost every page of it; and not only condemned as frail and imperfect, as guilty,

of a pardonable weakness, but in express terms excluded from heaven, unless, by timely repentance, he become reconciled to God through faith in the blood of Christ, and sanctification of the Holy Spirit. He will see that the Scripture enumerates "adultery, fornication, lasciviousness, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" offences among those works of the flesh, of which it says, in so many words, "that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

How great then must be the deceitfulness of sin, and how deplorable the ignorance or inconsistency of some professing Christians, when they can be brought to wink at, if not to indulge in, practices, which so clearly shut a man out from eternal happiness! The religion of Mahomet entices mankind sanctioning licentious indulgences, and holding out the prospect of their continuance in heaven. The religion of most heathen countries goes still farther, and celebrates the worship of its deities, with abominable impurities, which it is disgraceful even to mention. Not so the religion of Christ. That calls us "to holiness, not to uncleanness." It makes us members of Christ's body the Church, which is the temple of the Holy Ghost, "which temple if any man defile," by his uncleanness, "him shall God destroy." It holds forth its blessings only to those who are "pure" even "in heart." Far be it that any minister of this holy religion should

deceive his hearers into a false security, and preach to any unchaste or intemperate man, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Far be it that he should not tell him of his extreme peril, nay of his certain destruction, hereafter, if he do not forsake his sin, and turn unto God through Christ, and do works answerable to his repentance.

I have enlarged, it may be too long, upon a painful topic, not to accuse any one here present of sins so deadly, but because there is so much pollution in the world through lust, against which unhappily even Christians need to be on their guard, and which, by your good examples and decided discouragement, you may, in no small degree, contribute to put out of countenance, and to diminish, if not to banish, from amongst you. Do not be prevailed upon, by the example of others, to laugh at such perilous iniquities, or to be, in any way, accessory to their continuance; but exert yourselves rather, within the sphere of your example and influence, to promote that purity which becometh Christians, and without which no man "shall see God" in heaven.

There are also other sins, we observed, contrary to Christian purity; in fact, any sin is incompatible with it. Every breach of the divine commandments is a defilement. To be pure in life is to be free from its commission; to be pure

in heart is to be free even from the inclination to commit sin. But who is there thus pure? Naturally, no one. If we take a right estimate of sin, as the transgression of the law of God, which requires of us perfect love to God, and perfect charity to man, we know too well that we are by nature sadly prone to transgress, and by no means pure from inclinations to evil. It is not without reason then that we propose to consider,

III. *The difficulty, yet the blessedness, of cultivating purity of heart.*

Those who have formed to themselves right notions of the purity which God requires, and who have endeavoured to bring their inmost desires and inclinations to a conformity with his will, will be forward to acknowledge the difficulty, and, to our unassisted endeavours, the impossibility of such a work. They will confess, that often, when they would do good, evil was present with them; that what their minds approved, their corrupt nature was backward to pursue; that lukewarmness and insensibility to the divine mercies would often take place of devotion and gratitude; whilst feelings of envy, it may be, or causeless anger, or censoriousness, or pride, or uncharitableness, would too naturally arise within, instead of those meek, and kind, and humble, and benevolent dispositions, which the love of our neighbour implies. To-

curb and subdue these corrupt propensities, still more to eradicate them, and plant others in their stead, is a work impossible without God's Holy Spirit obtained, through Christ, to help our infirmities, and overcome our sins. But thanks be to God and our Saviour, that renovating Spirit is granted to us all, "to work in us both to will and to do that which is good." His sanctifying grace was given to us at our baptism, and if we have not provoked him, by our wilfulness, to leave us to ourselves, he is still with us. Even if we have thus sinned, he is still within the reach of penitent and faithful prayer. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let us then, in cultivating purity of heart, begin, with David, by imploring God to "make us a clean heart," and to give us "the comfort of his help." Under these auspices let the work be begun. But let not our own endeavours be wanting. The grace of God helps not the indolent. We shall not be saved in despite of ourselves. Whilst then you depend upon divine grace to assist and bless your endeavours, "be watchful" yourselves, and pray against temptation, however secret; check the first risings of sin, be it only in imagination; bind it while it is yet weak and feeble, before it acquires strength to bind you, and carry you away captive. If we cannot entirely prevent evil thoughts or

desires from arising in our hearts, we may at least restrain our outward actions; we may "flee from" those inward temptations, by engaging in profitable or innocent discourse, or by betaking ourselves to some useful occupation, which shall fully employ our minds. In particular, let us endeavour, by frequent meditation and constant study of the Scriptures, to impress upon our minds, as counteracting principles, the great truths of the Gospel; the mercy of God in Christ in giving a free pardon of all past sins to the penitent believer; the invaluable help of God's Holy Spirit; the certainty of everlasting punishment to wilful sinners; the hope of being like Christ in glory, if we are holy Christians. Let us thus combat our evil propensities, "stedfast in the faith," and we shall imperceptibly find them giving way, through God's grace, to better feelings. There will be a struggle at first; a painful one, it must be, to those especially whose *habits* are sinful, as well as the propensities. But peace is in reserve, and a blessedness of which a mind devoted to sin has no conception. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." The promise will be realized fully and gloriously in heaven. It is there that the pure spirits of the redeemed will behold for themselves the face of their heavenly Father, and rejoice for ever in the light and glory of the divine perfections.

But even now the pure Christian may be said, in a certain sense, to live, "as seeing Him who," properly speaking, "is invisible." Sin darkens and blinds the spiritual faculties of man. Holiness, on the contrary, clears and strengthens them. It enlightens the moral sense, by giving us less perplexed and livelier views of the being and attributes of God, and of his dealings with man, particularly in that glorious display of his justice and mercy, of his wisdom and power, of his holiness and truth, which he has made, through our Lord Jesus Christ, in the dispensation of the Gospel. Who would not aim at such a state of mind on earth, with such a reversion too in heaven; the clear and peaceful conviction of a lively faith here, to be followed by the everlasting glories of the beatific vision? "Beloved," saith St. John, "now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall *see him as he is.* And every man that hath this *hope in Christ, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*"

SERMON XII.

CONTENTMENT AND FIDELITY IN OUR CALLING.

1 Cor. vii. 24.

Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

THE Christian religion is a religion of peace, and makes good this claim in several ways. First, and chiefly, it proclaims "peace on earth," by preaching "to man good will" from above, when it points out to us, through the salvation purchased by Christ, the means of reconciliation with Almighty God. Again, the Gospel is a religion of peace, not only as enabling us to make our peace with God through Jesus Christ, but as teaching us to live in peace one with another. It quells the proud spirit of strife and passion, so common to man; it forbids revenge; it enforces loving-kindness and mercy; it pronounces a blessing on the peace-maker. There is also another way in which the Gospel pro-

motes peace upon earth; and that is by shedding around a spirit of contentment. Our religion brings *peace to the conscience*, by reconciling us to God, and enabling us to serve Him acceptably, though imperfectly, through Jesus Christ. It brings with it also *the peace of charity;* and, lastly, it brings with it the *peace of contentment* and *quietness.*

True religion interferes with none of the civil institutions of society; she takes them as she finds them. In order that a nation should become Christian, it is not necessary to throw it into confusion, to disturb its good order and tranquillity, to abolish its distinctions of rank and station, or to overthrow any of its established institutions. The object of the Gospel is far different, far higher, far better, than this. Its kingdom is not of this world, but the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Its views are not temporal but spiritual. As to present things, the great end of religion is to teach us, as it taught St. Paul, *in whatsoever state we are therein to be content;* and, as our Church excellently expresses it, "to do our duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call us." It is this great, this important, but too often forgotten lesson, that is taught us in the words of our text. "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide." It seems to have been thought by some of those whom St. Paul con-

verted to the Christian faith, that Christianity was to make some great change in their outward circumstances; that it was to break the ties by which they were bound before; to remove restraints; to weaken the claims of kindred; to do away with the distinction of rank, and to put all men more on a level than they had been under heathen superstition, or the imperfect system of the Mosaic law. But as our Lord said when applied to in a question of property, "Man, who made me a judge, or divider over you?" so does his Gospel say in regard to all worldly matters, that religion has nothing to do in deciding such points; that our being Christians makes no difference in our circumstances as citizens, but leaves us as we were, only with better principles to act upon, with better views to direct us, and with better hopes to support our minds, under the various duties, and difficulties, and trials, with which every station abounds. "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide." It is as if the apostle had said, "My brethren, it has pleased God, by my ministry, to invite or call you into the kingdom of his blessed Son, the Church of Christ; and I trust that this your Christian calling has produced, and will produce, in you much benefit: that it makes you to be sorry for, and to hate, your past evil ways; that it gives you peace with God through the blood of Christ; and that having

been bought by Christ with the price of his own blood, you are now no longer the slaves of sin, but free from sin, and the servants of God. These are the blessings to which you are called as Christians: *these*, and not any immunities, not any advancement in this present world. As to them 'brethren, abide in your calling,' continue in the station of life, in which the Gospel found you; you may serve God as well in one station as another; He is no respecter of persons or of ranks, but, in every condition, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him through Jesus Christ. If your worldly calling is honest and virtuous, your Christian calling is quite consistent with it, however low it may be, or however high." Such we may consider to be the meaning of the apostle's words, "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide."

Religion, indeed, does not chain a man of necessity to his original calling or condition. It does not check reasonable improvement; it does not make us insensible to our present comfort and respectability. On the contrary, by rendering us more conscientious and more industrious in all our ways, it rather promotes the improvement of our circumstances. For who are the persons who meet with encouragement in society; are they not those who make themselves useful in it by their diligence and attention to

their duties, or who gain our confidence by their honesty and integrity, by their fidelity and uprightness? In as far, then, as religion requires these virtues in the Christian, does she not also promote his substantial advantage in the world, and raise him in the scale of society? What the Gospel forbids is not diligence, is not temperance, is not skill in our business, is not probity; these she cherishes, commands, requires: the things that she forbids are restlessness, and discontent, turbulence, ambition, disobedience to our superiors, neglect of our appointed duties, and a spirit of repining in that state of life in which it has pleased God to place us. These are things which the Gospel decidedly condemns.

What does the apostle say in the very passage from which our text is taken? Attend I pray you to his words. Without forbidding you to accept any improvement in your circumstances, which God in his good providence may send you, the apostle's words will at the same time teach you to be content should it not please God to give you any change. "Art thou called," saith St. Paul, "being a servant, care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." Observe

the spirit shewn by the apostle in regard to this world's advantages. He allows us *to use them rather*, if we may have them lawfully, but *not to care*, if it should be God's good pleasure to withhold them from us. Is the Christian in servitude? And how should such a Christian feel? Shall he spurn the yoke under which he is placed? Shall he repine against God who permits him to be in servitude? Shall he think of nothing else but how he may become free? That would not be like a Christian. He must not care for the things of the world in this manner. No: let him remember that there is a far better freedom, for which he must care and labour. Even that liberty from the guilt of sin, and from its power, which has been purchased for all by Jesus Christ. Though a servant in the body, he may thus be free in Christ, and enjoy spiritual liberty, notwithstanding his temporal bondage.

Again, art thou free? Dost thou boast of thy liberty? Remember that thou art Christ's servant, bought by Him with the price of his own blood, and bound to hold thyself at his supreme disposal. He hath indeed ransomed us from the bondage of sin, and so far we are free, and no longer debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh; but *we are not our own, but bought with a price*, by Jesus Christ, and become his servants for our own good. His service is indeed perfect free-

dom, and we are made his servants, that "we may have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

But whilst religion reminds us all, that the distinctions of the world do not hold as regards our *eternal hopes*, so as to favour any however high, or to exclude any however low, from believing in Christ, and becoming equally free from sin, equally servants of our common Lord, we are no less strongly reminded, that we are, as far as religion has any thing to do with it, to abide in our worldly callings. Religion does not level the prince with his subject, the magistrate with the private citizen, the father with the child, the master with his servant. To subjects, and to all under authority, our religion says, "Let every man be subject to the higher powers;" subject, "not only for wrath, but for conscience sake;" not only from fear of present punishment, but from a principle of duty towards God, "for there is no power but of God;" kings and magistrates are his ministers, rendered necessary by his providence for the benefit of mankind, for the encouragement of the good, and the punishment of the evil. In this manner, whilst *those in authority* are reminded, that they hold their authority under God, responsible to Him, as *his ministers for the good of men*, we who are private citizens are taught, as we fear God, to "honour the king, and to submit to

every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." *A turbulent and factious subject cannot be a good Christian.* The same may be said of disobedient children, and disobedient servants; as indeed of all insubordination or want of due submission to lawful authority, whether in Church or state. The *general* command of the Bible is, that Christians should "submit themselves one to another," according to the relations in which they stand to each other, and that they should do this, not out of mere necessity, but "in the fear of God." This is the general command; and with regard to *particulars*, as you have already heard what the Scriptures say to those who are under authority on the one hand, and to those who exercise it on the other, suffer me, in like manner, to remind you of the commands given in Scripture, and incumbent upon us as Christians in the more private relations of life. To husbands and wives, for instance, the Scripture speaks as follows.

"*Wives* submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." On the other hand, "*Husbands*," says the apostle, "love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it. Let every one of you so love his wife as himself." The relative duties of parents and

children are enforced with equal emphasis. "*Children*, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth." "And ye, *Fathers*, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Train them in the way wherein they should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it."

To servants and masters the Scriptures speak with the same regard to the good order of society, and to the real well-being of all. "*Servants*, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men. Knowing that whatsoever good thing *any man* doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." These are the things which we are commanded in Scripture to "teach and exhort to those who are under the yoke of servitude; if any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ," by the mouth of his apostle, "and to the doctrine which is according to godliness," the apostle tells us that such a teacher "is proud, knowing nothing" of the real duty of servants, "but doting about" worldly "questions, and strifes about words, and supposing godliness to

be a matter of gain," by which men are to be rendered greater or richer than they were before, instead of wiser and better; more anxious to get to heaven, and more attentive in consequence to their duties, even if they be the duties of a servant. But let not any of us who are masters, take advantage of the duties of the servants, to forget our own. We all have our duties. Every relation of life brings with it its peculiar obligations. Whilst the Scripture condemns the disobedient servant, it says on the other hand, "*Masters*, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him."

If we leave the relations of civil and domestic life, and proceed to those which subsist in the Church, we shall find the same tone maintained in Scripture with respect to the faithful discharge of the duties of our calling. As on the one hand, *the ministers of Christ* are charged in the most solemn terms, to "take heed unto themselves, and to their doctrine," and in general "to take heed unto the ministry which they have received in the Lord, that they may fulfil it," to "feed the flock which is among them, taking the oversight thereof, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock;" so, on the other hand, *the people* are exhorted by St. James, not

to be "many masters" or teachers, "knowing that we shall receive a severer judgment.—He that is taught in the word," is commanded to "communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things," to "know those which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake; to obey their teaching, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief." Thus while the minister is made deeply responsible, as an instructor and guide of the flock, as their watchman and minister, it has pleased our Lord that his followers should also provide befittingly for the support of the sacred office, and shew to it that respect and regard which the nature of the work demands: above all that they should "rightly and duly" attend the sacraments, and other ordinances which the priesthood administers, and listen obediently to the word of God, which their ministers read to them in the church, and out of which they draw their instructions.

We have now taken a general view of the different relations of life, and have seen that it is not the object of religion to disturb the good order of society, but to confirm and establish it, by considerations of greater weight than any other source can supply; by the power of con-

science; the fear of God; the hopes of eternal life. Let every man therefore abide in his calling, performing its duties with greater diligence for the very reason that he is a Christian.

Before I conclude, I would advert briefly to the concluding words of my text. We are commanded to abide in our calling, and to abide therein with God, in submission to his will; in dependence upon his providence; in hope of his rewards in heaven. We are to continue in our station, not merely as a matter of prudence or necessity, but to "abide therein *with God*;" that is, first, *in submission to God's will*, knowing that nothing happens to us without his knowledge and permission, and that whenever our own honest endeavours fail of success, we must consider the events of our lives, even the most untoward, as the will of our heavenly Father.

Again, as we are commanded to abide with God in submission to his will, we are also encouraged to do so *in dependence on his good providence*, or with faith in his protection and favour. God being no respecter of persons, every man in every station may seek his favour through Christ, by repentance, faith, and obedience; and every man, so seeking God's favour through Jesus Christ, may trust in the good providence of God to order the events of his life so as shall, on the whole, be best for him.

Lastly, we may continue in our callings with

God *in hope of his everlasting mercies* in the kingdom of heaven. Whatever be our vocation in this present life, it will cease when we leave the world. The great question then will be, not what station we occupied here, but how we behaved ourselves in it? in what manner we discharged our duties to our fellow-creatures, and how far we took care not to neglect that great and general calling of Christians, which belongs generally to us all? Let us all endeavour to make *this* calling sure, even the invitation which God has given us all to the kingdom of heaven. May this hope support every one of us, however trying the circumstances of his worldly vocation may be! May it excite each of us to greater piety; greater faith in Christ; greater love and devotion towards God; and, at the same time, a greater diligence in the duties of our present condition; whilst we look upon them as forming an important part of those "good works, which God hath prepared," by his providence, "that we should walk in them." In a word, "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he doeth; and there is no respect of persons." Therefore, "brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God;"

submitting implicitly to *his* sovereign will; reposing devoutly on his gracious providence; and waiting patiently, through the merits of his Redeemer, for a merciful reward in heaven.

SERMON XIII.

CHRISTIAN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATT. v. 6.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

THE term 'righteousness' is one of continual occurrence in the language of Scripture, and our familiarity with it has led us to suppose that it needs no explanation. Yet this is far from being the case. Some idea, it is true, is easily attached to the word; but not so easily a definite and correct notion. It is however important that we should have a clear conception of that, the pursuit of which is so intimately connected with our happiness. For "*blessed* are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Sometimes, in holy writ, righteousness means *justice or equity*. "Better," says the Wise Man, "is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right." Again, righteousness is often used to denote the *whole of our duty to our neighbour*, as distinguished from sobriety or

temperance, which sums up our duty to ourselves, and from godliness or piety, which expresses our duty towards God. Thus the gracious dispensation of the Gospel, which hath appeared with salvation to our fallen race, teaches us in this present world to live "soberly, *righteously*, and godly." But more frequently, and especially in the Old Testament, righteousness implies a conformity to the law of God in general, and not only in the exercise of the particular virtue of integrity, or in the performance of our duty to our neighbour. It is in this sense that Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth are said to have been "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." None, however, of these meanings appear to meet precisely the purport of our text. The righteousness there meant must be that which is offered in the Gospel dispensation to the desires and attainment of the Christian: it is the righteousness which the disciples of the Redeemer are exhorted to pursue.

This righteousness must undoubtedly include justice; it must extend farther, so as to comprise the whole of our duty to our neighbour; it must take a wider range still, so as to embrace a general conformity to the will of God, in all his commandments and ordinances, whether personal, social, or religious. For all these obligations of justice, of social duty, and of obedience

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SERMON XIII.

CHRISTIAN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATT. v. 6.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

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been bought by Christ with the price of his own blood, you are now no longer the slaves of sin, but free from sin, and the servants of God. These are the blessings to which you are called as Christians: *these*, and not any immunities, not any advancement in this present world. As to them 'brethren, abide in your calling,' continue in the station of life, in which the Gospel found you; you may serve God as well in one station as another; He is no respecter of persons or of ranks, but, in every condition, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him through Jesus Christ. If your worldly calling is honest and virtuous, your Christian calling is quite consistent with it, however low it may be, or however high." Such we may consider to be the meaning of the apostle's words, "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide."

Religion, indeed, does not chain a man of necessity to his original calling or condition. It does not check reasonable improvement; it does not make us insensible to our present comfort and respectability. On the contrary, by rendering us more conscientious and more industrious in all our ways, it rather promotes the improvement of our circumstances. For who are the persons who meet with encouragement in society; are they not those who make themselves useful in it by their diligence and attention to

their duties, or who gain our confidence by their honesty and integrity, by their fidelity and uprightness? In as far, then, as religion requires these virtues in the Christian, does she not also promote his substantial advantage in the world, and raise him in the scale of society? What the Gospel forbids is not diligence, is not temperance, is not skill in our business, is not probity; these she cherishes, commands, requires: the things that she forbids are restlessness, and discontent, turbulence, ambition, disobedience to our superiors, neglect of our appointed duties, and a spirit of repining in that state of life in which it has pleased God to place us. These are things which the Gospel decidedly condemns.

What does the apostle say in the very passage from which our text is taken? Attend I pray you to his words. Without forbidding you to accept any improvement in your circumstances, which God in his good providence may send you, the apostle's words will at the same time teach you to be content should it not please God to give you any change. "Art thou called," saith St. Paul, "being a servant, care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." Observe

temperance, which sums up our duty to ourselves, and from godliness or piety, which expresses our duty towards God. Thus the gracious dispensation of the Gospel, which hath appeared with salvation to our fallen race, teaches us in this present world to live "soberly, *righteously*, and godly." But more frequently, and especially in the Old Testament, righteousness implies a conformity to the law of God in general, and not only in the exercise of the particular virtue of integrity, or in the performance of our duty to our neighbour. It is in this sense that Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth are said to have been "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." None, however, of these meanings appear to meet precisely the purport of our text. The righteousness there meant must be that which is offered in the Gospel dispensation to the desires and attainment of the Christian: it is the righteousness which the disciples of the Redeemer are exhorted to pursue.

This righteousness must undoubtedly include justice; it must extend farther, so as to comprise the whole of our duty to our neighbour; it must take a wider range still, so as to embrace a general conformity to the will of God, in all his commandments and ordinances, whether personal, social, or religious. For all these obligations of justice, of social duty, and of obedience

generally, are still incumbent upon Christians, and, accordingly, form a part of that "everlasting righteousness" which Messiah was to "bring in" under the Gospel. It is the ceremonial law only which has been abolished under the Christian dispensation: the moral law has indeed ceased to be our covenant of acceptance, but still continues to be the rule of life, which the Christian is called upon, and by divine grace enabled, to fulfil[a]. But besides all this, and before we can speak of inherent righteousness, as man is a sinner, and "the whole world is guilty before God," chargeable with the transgression of some or other of his laws, or with the omission of prescribed duties; for who is there that has loved God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength? or loved his neighbour as himself? man being thus guilty, and exposed to a sentence of divine condemnation, it is clearly necessary that he should first of all seek that *negative* righteousness, which consists in the pardon of sin, in the cancelling of imputed guilt, so that it shall no longer be laid to the offender's account.

St. Paul tells us, that "the righteousness of God," that which God Almighty has provided for man, and which he will therefore accept, "is revealed to us in the Gospel[b]." But how does the Gospel reveal this righteousness? Is it not

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submitting implicitly to *his* sovereign will; reposing devoutly on his gracious providence; and waiting patiently, through the merits of his Redeemer, for a merciful reward in heaven.

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words, a desire to be pardoned upon our repentance and faith in Christ, and to become obedient to God's will, by doing in all things, through the help of his Holy Spirit, that which is right. We shall thus be at once negatively and inherently righteous; *negatively*, in the cancelling of our guilt; *inherently*, in the possession, though imperfectly, of an habitual readiness, and a daily increasing power, to live temperately, uprightly, and piously; governing ourselves in our whole conduct by the declared will of God as contained in the Scriptures. And is not this the best object that can be proposed to the desires of the human soul? Is there any thing else that we should hunger and thirst after more? The things of this world are, all, in a manner, without us, and perish with the using; even those things that effect the body with pleasure or pain are external to our real selves, and transitory like the rest. But true righteousness, the righteousness which lies open to the attainment of Christians, comes home at once to our souls, and is everlasting. The new heavens and earth which shall succeed to these which we now inhabit, after the conflagration of the great day, will be, of course, a world of bliss, but chiefly for this reason, because they will be also a world of righteousness. Even now "the work of righteousness is peace," and that not a transient effect, but one

which abides all outward changes, even "quietness" of conscience, and humble "assurance" through Christ "continually."

But if these things be true, surely those who hunger and thirst after righteousness must be very numerous, and form the bulk of mankind. But is it so? Does the conduct of most men, does the conduct of most Christians, indicate an abiding desire to have their past sins forgiven, and their present and future character regulated by their duty? Is there that anxiety to obtain God's favour and to do his will, which we see exhibited to obtain each other's applause, or to accomplish our own ends? But I forbear. These general questions concerning others, run the risk of becoming censorious. We are too prone to view religion as it binds our neighbour, rather than as it concerns ourselves. The great question for us to ask, and to answer truly, is, each to himself, "Am *I* hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Do I with sincerity use the words of the Psalmist, Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities; create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me?" Or again, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Behold I have longed after thy precepts; quicken me in thy statutes?" This is the natural language of those who really desire to be in the favour of God. We may judge of our own desires by the accordance of such language with them.

Nor must it be a mere desire of any kind, but a strong habitual, and continually recurring desire, such as may fairly be expressed by hunger and thirst; a desire too that leads us to take right measures for its satisfaction, as hunger and thirst impel mankind to exert themselves in procuring food.

We may desire to be righteous only with the faintness of wishing, and not with the hunger and thirst of *eager pursuit*. Every one who believes that "there is, verily, a reward for the righteous," must so far at least wish to be righteous, that he may inherit the reward. But this is not the state of mind implied in so strong an expression as our Lord has thought fit to use. As if the eagerness of one appetite were not sufficient for his purpose, he adds a second. We must not hunger merely, but "hunger and thirst" after righteousness. It must be to us as our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father. It is a sickly body that feels no appetite for its proper food. It would indicate a still more morbid condition to prefer poison or unwholesome viands, to pure and salutary nourishment. What then must that soul be that does not

hunger and thirst after righteousness? In a state of moral disease, tending unto death. What if it has an appetite for sin, though none for righteousness? In a state of still more rapid danger, as a body under the influence of poison.

Once more: hunger and thirst impel mankind to *exertion*, in order to satisfy these demands of nature. In like manner, the Christian is impelled, by his eager desire of righteousness, to adopt effectual measures for its attainment, to use diligently and daily the means of grace, both public and private, which God has appointed in his Church for our instruction and improvement in every "good word and work." Amongst these means Christians have, for their instruction, the study of God's word and other writings calculated to promote the profitable understanding of it, accompanied by a regular attendance upon the public teaching of the Christian ministry. It may seem strange, that a Christian minister should not be prevented, by a due sense of his own unworthiness, from particularising the teaching of the Christian ministry as a means of attaining to righteousness. But such, surely, the Christian ministry ought to be; and whilst we think humbly of ourselves, we must not forget the office in which we have engaged, the duty with which we are charged. It is our part to direct our labours, in an especial manner, to the attainment of that knowledge, which may con-

tribute to save not only ourselves, but them also who hear us. Add to this, our divine Lord, in whose name we act, and from whom originally we derive our commission to teach in his Church, has promised to be with his ministers "alway, even unto the end of the world." It is from his presence with us by his Holy Spirit that we look for the efficacy of our labours; it is on this ground that we rest our claim to your attention; and invite you to receive the food which is to nourish your souls, though it be conveyed to you in "earthen vessels." For our instruction, then, we have the means already mentioned, which, under the guidance of God's good Spirit, will not fail to lead to sufficient knowledge every sincere enquirer.

But what are the means for obtaining this necessary aid of God's Holy Spirit? One of these, and a most important one, is *prayer*. Prayer, habitually, in our closets, which is most emphatically enforced upon us by our Lord. Prayer in our families; "As for me and my house," said the noble Joshua, "we will serve the Lord." Prayer in the public congregation; "not omitting to assemble ourselves together, as the custom of some is," to their own great disgrace, and to the dishonour of Almighty God.

The *Sacraments* are also prominent means of grace. At the first entrance into his Church, and even in our infant days, our Lord awaits us

with the sacrament of *Baptism*, to make us thereby children of God, and to give us an interest in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in all other Christian privileges, necessary to bring us to heaven. This is the commencement of our Christian life, the first admission into a state of salvation. As we grow up, it is our great concern to realize the professions and privileges of our baptism; and if we are not wanting on our part in sincere endeavours to "proceed daily" as we have promised "in all virtue and godliness of living," or in case of forgetfulness, and failure, and sin, to repent and return and seek pardon through Christ, our Lord, most surely, is not wanting in his "means of grace." In particular he has provided the sacrament of his *last supper*, as an especial means of continuing and strengthening that grace which was first given with the sacrament of baptism.

Another especial means of grace is the due observance of the *Lord's day*; the regular recurrence of which is so admirably adapted to renew our knowledge and strength, and to prevent the "lamp" of piety from going out, and leaving us in darkness for want of its necessary and regular supplies.

To the means already mentioned, we must add our own exertions to live righteously every day of our existence. I call them a means, and a necessary means, of grace; a *means*, because

they are effectual only as a means under God's blessing; a *necessary* means, because, in the second place, God has promised to enlighten the minds of those only, who strive to do his will; and to work in us both to will and to do that which is good, if we will endeavour at the same time "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," lest God should otherwise desert us, and we should consequently fail of being saved.

Those who *do* hunger and thirst after righteousness, will thus labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, with as much (should it not be with more?) eagerness and diligence than the needy labour for the meat which perisheth. And "blessed" are they, "for they shall be filled." Happy are they, for they shall be satisfied. There is no disappointment here. The labouring man may work, yet not eat of the fruit of his labours. A famine may thwart his hopes, or oppression may defraud him of his hire: not so with the Christian. They that "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and labour accordingly for the food of eternal life, shall, assuredly, "be filled." "The Son of God" has promised, and it is He that "giveth" this sustenance. Those who diligently employ themselves in the course of piety and duty already detailed, will find, by God's blessing, a gradual proficiency the result of their labours. It is a constant law of our nature, that

the actions which we perform, tend to produce in us a corresponding habit. He, for instance, who, by repeated acts of self-restraint, practises temperance, will find temperance become gradually habitual and easy, so as no longer to require the self-denying sacrifice, but to be the spontaneous act as it were of his second nature. Almost unconsciously, he will not only do better things, but become a better man: his character will assume a higher tone, his inclinations receive a nobler direction. It is so in the other virtues, as also let us remember in the vices; we do the acts, and without our control the habit is secretly and gradually forming, in a manner which is appositely illustrated by the increase of the body, in stature or in strength, from the supplies of nourishing food.

It is thus also, by the grace and blessing of God through Christ, in the cultivation of righteousness. Continual exertion in the right way, is accompanied by continual proficiency. By divine grace, success is as certain, as the promises of God are true. And with success will come satisfaction. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be satisfied. Success in our earthly pursuits is almost always mingled with disappointment. We hunger and thirst; we feed the appetite to the very full; and yet we are not satisfied. But it is not so in the pursuits of righteousness. Insipid as the offer of righteous-

ness is to those whose taste is vitiated by sin, there is nothing capable of affording so solid satisfaction. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" so that those who succeed in acquiring righteousness, shall not hunger and thirst for other things. Or if, to a certain extent, other things are needful, we have an especial promise, that to those who "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," these things "shall be added."

The only drawback to the satisfaction of the righteous, is the imperfection of their inherent righteousness. But that will lessen daily, in proportion to their advancement, and finally it will be done away in heaven, where "righteousness dwells" unmixed with human infirmity, and where there is accordingly "*fulness of joy* for evermore."

SERMON XIV.

PERSONAL RELIGION.

2 SAM. xii. 7.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

THE circumstances under which these words of the prophet were spoken, are familiar to every reader of the Scriptures. King David, so conspicuous, in every other instance, for his piety and virtue, had been led away, in an unguarded hour, to commit the base crime of adultery with the wife of one of his bravest officers, Uriah the Hittite. To conceal this wicked action, he was driven on to another, even so far as to become accessory, in the most treacherous manner, to the murder of the brave man, whom he had already so grievously injured. The whole narrative furnishes a striking warning to all, however advanced in virtue, to be on their guard against the deceitfulness of sin. He who was, in other instances, the man after God's own heart[a], was

[a] Compare 1 Sam. xiii. 14. and 1 Kings xv. 5.

guilty of adultery, perfidy, and murder. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall; let him never cease to watch and to pray for divine help, lest he be led into temptation. This and other most important lessons admit of being derived from this part of the history of an individual, who was in the main so eminent an example of piety and virtue, yet, on this one occasion, sinned so heinously, and was punished so severely, in this world, although upon his most sincere and bitter repentance, he was restored once more to the favour of his God. For we might hence enlarge upon the hatefulness of sin in the sight of God, by whomsoever committed, when we observe how much even David suffered because of his sin in the case of Bathsheba; we might enlarge too upon the necessity, the nature, and the efficacy, of true repentance, such as David's was, for the same sad transgression. But my object on the present occasion is rather to consider that particular part of this melancholy transaction to which the words in the text relate, and in which the insensibility of David to his own sin is so strongly contrasted with his readiness to reprobate the sins of others.

The offence of David had been, as we have observed, of a very aggravated nature. It was adultery, effected apparently by a tyrannical exercise of his kingly power, and followed by

treachery and murder. It was an offence too against one of his bravest captains; nor was it merely the offence of a moment. The lapse of a considerable time found the king not filled with repentant sorrow, but still insensible to his crime. Under these circumstances it was that the Lord sent the prophet Nathan unto David: and "he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller to the rich man; and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him." Great was the indignation of the king at an act, base indeed and oppressive, but infinitely less criminal than the one with which he himself was chargeable. "David's anger was greatly kindled" against the rich man, who deprived his poor neighbour of a favourite lamb; and not content with ordering the legal penalty of four-fold restitution, he swears a solemn oath, that the man who hath done this thing shall 'surely die.' Little did he

think what a sentence he was passing upon himself! Beguiled by sin, his conscience lay asleep. He could see the slightest fault in another, and forget the greatest committed by himself; verifying most sadly the saying of a later prophet, that the heart of man is of all things the most "deceitful," and, when left to itself, "desperately wicked." How surprised would the monarch be at the prophet's application of his tale! how thunderstruck at the appalling words, "Thou art the man!"

The sin of David was exceedingly heinous; and God forbid we should ever have such offences to remember or to forget as his were! By the mercy and grace of God, may we be kept from any similar violation of his laws! Yet let us not forget that David was a man like ourselves; nay more, that he had been an eminent servant of God; and that if from being placed in happier circumstances, or under a more benign dispensation of religion, we have been mercifully preserved from temptations and from conduct like his, still we have all the same corrupt nature which he had, and in particular the same proneness to self-delusion, which was so strikingly exhibited in the case of the fallen patriarch.

The fact is, mankind in general are not only partial to themselves, and willingly blind to their own faults, but seldom even think about them at all. We are too apt to view religion only as it

binds others, not as it concerns ourselves. We forget that if our neighbour ought to be pious, just, charitable, chaste, temperate, so also ought *we*. When we read the Scriptures, or hear a sermon, we are too prone to waste our time in thinking how what we hear or read applies to those about us, rather than to our own case; too apt to deplore the offences which they commit, rather than those of which we ourselves are guilty. Hence arise two great evils in particular.

I. The sin of censoriousness.

II. The danger of insensibility to our own duty.

I. There is the *sin of censoriousness*.

"David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." He was indignant that such conduct should have been practised within his dominions. No interest nor gratification of his own being concerned in the case, he could see clearly the fault committed, and pronounce immediately upon its guilt; nor was he checked by any remembrance of his own, far more enormous, wickedness. And to something similar to this are we not all too prone? Do we not readily discern the splinter in a brother's eye, forgetful of the beam that is in our own? If we were more sensible of our own faults and weaknesses, should we not be more backward in noticing those of

other men? Were there more humility in the world, there would also be more charity. Christians would have too much to do in correcting their own imperfections, to spend their time, unnecessarily, in criticising those of their neighbours. Instead of saying one to another, "Thou art the man that dost despise the commandments of God, and make light of the Christian faith," every man's conscience would be disposed rather to bring the declaration more home, and to charge *himself* with lukewarmness in his religion, and failures in his obedience. Thus as regards the peace of human society, and the friendly intercourse of Christians one with another, how salutary and excellent would it be that we should learn to make a more personal application of the doctrines and precepts of our religion, and so turn the stream of our censures to the cleansing of our own hearts, instead of letting it loose to the embittering of human life!

And as, in respect of others, the sin of censoriousness would be less common, and the Church at large be wonderfully more united in peace and charity, were our application of religion more personal; so, as regards ourselves individually, we should obviously be less exposed to what we proposed to consider in the second place.

II. The *danger of insensibility*; or the risk of

neglecting religion as an individual and *personal concern.*

There are not wanting (indeed there never have been wanting) persons who decidedly make a jest of religion, and others who affect an unnatural contempt for it. Such men will, of course, avoid all personal application of religion to themselves, and will gladly cherish as deep an apathy on the subject as conscience will allow. Men who are determined not to obey the call of piety, cannot wish to awake to a sense of its importance.

But this, surely, is not a common case? The bulk of Christians entertain for their religion a reverential value, so as to be grieved by the jests of the profane, and still more by the scoffs of the infidel. Yet, with this general value for religion, and this decided acknowledgment of its importance to mankind at large, how common is it to shut our eyes to the personal interest we have in it ourselves! Some, for instance, support the cause of religion merely for *example's* sake; that is, they acknowledge its importance to others, but not to themselves. It is certainly our bounden duty to set a good example in all things. Every person, however humble his station, cannot but do either good or harm by his example: it is a talent for which we are all responsible; and more especially those to whom Providence has given a larger measure of influence, whether it

be from their station, their talents, their property, their reputation, their popularity, or any similar causes.

At the same time we must not act merely with a view to our example. We are to be pious and virtuous for ourselves, as well as for others. We have souls as well as they, and shall have to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ no less than our neighbours. Indeed the more we strive to be really and intrinsically good, the greater will be the weight, and the brighter the lustre, of our example to others also.

How paltry then, how lamentably unsound and weak, is that maxim, which we sometimes hear broached with respect to the public ordinances of religion, of frequenting them merely in order to set a good example! It is as if a man should say, "I have no personal concern myself in the public worship of God. I have no business of my own in his house; no faith to be established; no duties to be reminded of; no sins to confess; no prayers and praises to offer up; no sacraments to benefit by; no communion to cultivate with my fellow-members in the body of Christ; in a word, I have no Maker to adore, no Redeemer to believe in, no sanctifying grace from God's Holy Spirit to invoke: *I am not the man* whom these things concern; religion was intended for others, *not for me*; and for their sake only am I called upon to make a shew of

piety." Such is the real force of that irrational way of talking, which some indulge in on the subject of example in matters of religion; a clear evasion, in fact, and blind forgetfulness of their own personal responsibility; an acknowledgment of the value of religion in the general, but a denial of its importance as to any *real* application of it to its proper purpose, the actual enlightment, restoration, and improvement, of each one man *individually*.

A similar forgetfulness of the personal importance of religion is often found among those, whose business it is, whether from duty or otherwise, to inculcate piety upon others. In this respect, the *ministers of religion* are peculiarly in danger. They are obliged by their profession to interest themselves in the subject of religion; they are called upon, by the duties of their office, to press upon others the excellence and the obligations of piety and virtue. Hence they are in danger of forgetting their own personal concern in the subject, and of being content with that professional interest in it, which, even from worldly considerations, they are obliged to evince. Whilst they inculcate upon their hearers the importance of the one thing needful, they may forget to bring the lesson home to themselves; and so, though instrumental, under God's grace, to the saving of other men's souls, they may, all the while, be neglecting their own.

This, my brethren, is the danger of those who minister in holy things, the danger of merging their *personal* interest in religion, in their *professional* concern for it.

A similar danger attends those who, though not in the ministry, *yet voluntarily interest themselves in the public diffusion of religion;* and so run the risk, too often, of being more zealous for the religion of others, than for their own. Do I then condemn a zeal for the public diffusion of religion in any but the clergy? God forbid! We are all believers, and as such deeply interested in the extension of our holy faith; we are equally subjects of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, as such, bound not only to pray, but to use our endeavours, that his kingdom may come throughout the world; we are all fellow-creatures and fellow-candidates for immortality, and so impelled and called upon to sympathize in the eternal welfare of each other. And while our exertions to this end are conducted not only with zeal, but with sound discretion and a due regard to our station in the body of Christ's Church, without usurping offices to which the providence of God has not seen fit to call us, it is not only our privilege, but our duty, to promote religion as widely as possible, and to cooperate together, under God's grace and blessing, by all orderly, and peaceable, and scriptural methods, to the hastening of that blessed time, when Jew

and Gentile, bond and free, the polished nations of the civilized world, and those who are as yet sunk in barbarism, shall all bow the knee to the same redeeming Lord, and the good tidings of the Gospel become familiar, not only to ourselves, but "to all people." Happy they who shall be instrumental to this glorious catastrophe, and far be it, my brethren, that I should dissuade you from sharing, by all discreet and Christian methods, in this holy and blessed work! Only, in your zeal for others, forget not yourselves. Whilst you contribute by your pecuniary aid, your exertions, your influence, and your talents, to support public institutions, however excellent, let it not be said that you have forgotten to meditate upon the private state of *your own* soul, and neglected to secure *for yourself* an interest in the mercy of God and the merits of your Redeemer. The present times do perhaps peculiarly need a caution of this kind; not so much it may be in this country. Yet here too there is increasing (and God grant it may continue to increase daily) a Christian sympathy in the religious wants of those, who lie under the dark and deadly shadow of spiritual ignorance. But let it not be said, whilst we are anxious that others should hear the word of God, that we neglect to listen to it ourselves. Let not the Bible which we would circulate among Papists, Mahometans, and Heathens, lie unopened by those who dis-

tribute it, recording, in the accumulating dust upon the holy volume, a daily increasing memorial of our lamentable inconsistency, a sad monument of our self-delusion. No: *be* zealous for the honour of your Saviour; *be* zealous for the good of your fellow-creatures; but let not all your zeal evaporate in public transactions. Let private personal piety be the foundation of your conduct.

The language of Scripture speaks generally, and brings to all, who will embrace them on the proffered terms, the good tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. At the same time, it addresses each one of us individually, saying, as Nathan said unto David, "Thou art the man." *Thou* art the man, whose image is represented in the mirror of Scripture; *thou*, to whom the hope of restoration through Christ is held forth; to whom the threatenings are addressed which God has denounced against wilful disobedience; it is to *thee*, as much as to any other man, that God offers pardon through Christ upon thy repentance, and the help of his Holy Spirit in answer to thy prayers: it is from *thee*, as much as from any other man, that God expects obedience to his will, submission to his power, delight in his mercy, adoration of his divine perfections, and a continual aspiring after his heavenly promises. In a word, "the life of doctrine is its application." If we apply it to others only, it is

to us a dead letter; we may do them good, but we do none to ourselves. We carry a lamp in our hands, which sheds light around us, but leaves our own steps in darkness. We feed the hungry soul of our neighbour with the bread of life, but are perishing ourselves for want of appetite. It was not David's seeing the guilt of the rich man in seizing his poor neighbour's favourite lamb, that shewed his wisdom, but his confessing his own guilt in a far more aggravated matter. It was *then* that his sense of right began to avail him, when the prophet's awakening words opened his eyes to his own conduct, and wrung from him the penitent confession, "I have sinned against the Lord."

There is another species of self-delusion, to which also you must permit me to advert: I mean *that*, sometimes found among lay Christians, of supposing, that the only persons seriously interested in the subject of religion are the clergy. True it is, that the ministers of religion are doubly interested in its observance, both personally and professionally. True also it is, that those who teach others should first teach themselves, and be ensamples of piety and virtue. And severer, therefore, will be the judgment which *they* will have to undergo;—a solemn consideration this, to warn men not to undertake lightly, much less to usurp irregularly, the sacred office. But is it a reason for confining to

the ministers of religion the obligations of the Gospel? Is it a ground for asserting that piety is very well 'in a priest,' but may easily be dispensed with in others? In fact, why was the sacred office ordained, but for the purpose of providing for the edification of the whole body of Christians? Yes, my Christian hearer, though not engaged *professionally* to minister to the religion *of others*, yet thou art bound *personally* to take care of *thine own*. Thou hast a soul no less than thy minister: and to thee, no less than to him, piety and virtue, or in other words repentance, faith, and obedience, are the indispensable terms of life eternal. There is one road to both, to the people as well as to the priest; one fallen nature to be renewed; one Spirit to restore it, one redeeming Lord, to whom they both belong, and in whom they must both believe; one God and Father of all, to be honoured, obeyed, and loved, by each one of his children.

Whether then we be ministers to others or ministered to ourselves; whether we be high or low, rich or poor, great or insignificant, and however zealous we may be for the cause of religion at large; let us never overlook our personal concern in it; let us never forget, in dependence upon God's Holy Spirit, to work out *our own* salvation.

When we frequent the house of God, let it be to join ourselves in the devotions there offered

up to our common Lord, and not, as idle spectators, to delegate, as it were, to others, those prayers and praises, which should ascend from the altar of our own hearts, those confessions which we should make of our own sins, and professions of our own faith. And, in like manner, when we hear or read the Scriptures, or other scriptural instruction, let our eyes be turned inward on our own hearts, or backward on our own lives, or forward to our own prospects, not around upon our neighbours. To ourselves let the application be made, not to them. Instead of lamenting, "Oh! that these truths were more commonly believed, and these duties more generally performed!" let us learn to say each to himself, "These are the truths, which *I* am to believe; these are the duties, which *I* am to perform; these are the views of my nature and destinies, which *I* am to make familiar; these the hopes, by which *I* am to be actuated; the promises, upon which *I* am to depend; the threatenings, which *I* am to dread; the solemn impressions of time and of eternity, of heaven and hell, of death and judgment; the faith in God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, by which *I* am to be influenced." For 'thou art the man,' even *thou*, whosoever thou art that hearest me, who art concerned in all these things. Go then, and whatsoever thou expectest from thy neighbour, whatsoever things true or

excellent, whatsoever things pure, just, or lovely, whatsoever things of good report, virtuous, or praiseworthy, thou thinkest right in others, "Go, and do thou likewise."

Say not that which is possible to others is impossible to thee: say not thy previous sins have been too great to be now corrected; thy spiritual insensibility too habitual to be overcome: but remember that blessed Spirit of light and wisdom, of holiness and strength, of peace and comfort, which the Saviour of mankind has purchased for them, which he shed so abundantly on his infant Church, and which he has promised to all his followers in every age, that God will readily bestow, in answer to their earnest prayers. "If ye know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." It is in dependence upon this divine Spirit, and not upon your own 'weak flesh,' that we exhort you to go forth with a good courage, and attempt yourselves every thing you deem excellent in your fellow-Christians. When David was brought by the prophet to a sense of his sin and folly, and to a personal application to himself of his knowledge of right and wrong, he immediately set about the work of repentance, and among other things composed that memorable Psalm, the 51st. He did not give himself up to despair, but after

invoking, with deep confessions of his sin, the mercy of his offended God, he ventures still to implore the divine help, that he might again rejoice in the salvation of God, notwithstanding his recent and flagrant delinquencies. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me: cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." The same divine grace is more clearly offered to the prayers of Christians. We have the fullest assurance possible, that God is ready to renew our hearts, and to make our spirits right before him; to free us from ignorance, insensibility, and sin, to uphold us in the true way, and to give us a sound judgment in all things, that, instead of wishing to evade the calls of religion, we may rejoice in the way of salvation, directed and supported by the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. So that to each one of us it may be said, Thou art the man, who art not only bound, but who mayest also be enabled, to serve God, through Jesus Christ; so that thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, and hast nothing to plead in thy defence, if thou wilt still neglect to make religion, *to thyself in particular as well as to others, a matter of practical interest, and personal obligation.*

SERMON XV.

GOOD ANGELS.

HEB. i. 14.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

FROM a consciousness of our own spiritual nature, we might be led to imagine that there were other intelligent creatures in the universe, unincumbered, as we are, with bodily imperfections, and forming a higher link in that wonderful chain of being, which, ascending by degrees innumerable, connects the material earth with reasonable man, and which might well be supposed to continue to ascend still, through nobler gradations of existence, until it reached its termination at the footstool of the throne of God. Such ideas, however, could only be matter of conjecture. But the holy Scriptures furnish us with much authentic instruction concerning the inhabitants of the invisible world, and instruction too of such a nature, as is calculated not more to

interest a rational curiosity, than it is to raise and refine our moral character. It is to this subject that I propose to invite your attention now, so far as to consider what the substance is of that knowledge, which it hath pleased God to reveal to us concerning *good angels.* I shall distribute the enquiry under the following heads.

I. The nature, number, and character of the angels.

II. Their office as connected with mankind.

III. The practical importance of the subject.

I. We have to consider the *nature, number, and character* of the angels.

The word 'angel' properly signifies a messenger, and it is chiefly in their character of *messengers* from God to man, that we have been made acquainted with them in the Scriptures. Still incidentally much information is conveyed concerning the rank which they hold among the creatures of God. Their *nature* is described as being superior to the human nature, even when most free from sin. We were made originally inferior to the angels; so that when our blessed Lord took upon him the seed of Abraham, he became for a while lower than the angels, though by inheritance their Lord, and the object of their adoration. Their *number* is incalculable. More than twelve legions were ready to obey our

Lord's command,' had he chosen to require it, in the garden of Gethsemane. Thousand thousands are they that minister to the Ancient of days, and ten thousand times ten thousand who stand before him[a].

This "innumerable company of angels[b]" is no less remarkable for *holiness* than for the multitude of its hosts. Possessing from the first a nobler nature than ours, they have never polluted it by sin, but have been continually advancing it to still higher perfection by a course of the most zealous and holy obedience. So acceptable are their services to Almighty God, that our Saviour directs us to pray for nothing more in this respect, than that we may do the will of God 'in earth as it is done in heaven.' Their only law is the will of the Most High; they are the ministers of God, that do his pleasure, executing his commandments, and hearkening unto the voice of his word[c]; and that with an *energy*, which the most powerful agents in nature are the best calculated to represent. For the angels of God are in activity like the winds, or like a flame of fire[d]. But their zeal, though full of energy, is under the guidance of the most enlightened *wisdom*. To be wise as an angel of God, is a proverbial expression applied in Scripture to extraordinary and more

[a] Dan. vii. 10. [b] Heb. xii. 22. [c] Ps. ciii. 19, 20.
[d] Heb. i. 7.

than human discernment[e]. They are in fact "angels of light[f]," as distinguished for wisdom as for holiness.

Among these holy and elect angels of light, who all so far excel mankind in righteousness and wisdom, as also in strength, there are doubtless gradations as amongst men; even "thrones and dominions, principalities and powers," in the invisible as well as in the visible world; and perhaps among the archangelic princes there may be some who as much excel an ordinary angel, as the lowest individual in the heavenly hosts excels mankind[g]. Oh! what a world must that be which is peopled by such inhabitants! How great that glory, the distant radiance of which, shed occasionally and sparingly upon us, is sufficient to entrance the soul with admiration, and to fill it with ardent longings for a more intimate acquaintance with such excellence! But above all, how great must He be who created such glorious beings, and before whom even they are chargeable "with folly!" How inconceivably holy and wise and powerful the Son of God, our gracious Redeemer, who made the angels! "For by Him," the apostle assures us, "were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or

[e] 2 Sam. xiv. 17, &c. [f] 2 Cor. xi. 14. [g] Col. i. 16. Dan. xii. 1.

dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins[h]."

It might be imagined, that beings so exalted as the angels, would not condescend to interest themselves in the concerns of so inferior, so fallen, and so perverse a creature as man. But pride, my brethren, is known only amongst ourselves. It is unknown in heaven. As our divine Lord vouchsafes to look down upon us with compassion, so do his holy angels condescend to interest themselves deeply in our welfare, and as "our elder brothers in the skies," to regard us apparently with the most affectionate concern. They know that the "heirs of salvation" are members together with themselves of the great "family" of God[i], and that after sojourning upon earth for a time, they also will be admitted into the immediate presence of the Father in heaven. Let it not surprise us then to be informed, that the heavenly hosts do interest themselves greatly in our happiness, and are actively employed in advancing it. For "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" But these considerations bring us to the second point proposed for our consideration, which was,

[h] Col. i. 14, 16. [i] Eph. iii. 15.

II. The office of the holy angels as connected with mankind.

Under the earlier dispensations, both that of the law, and still more under those that preceded it, actual appearances of angels were sometimes vouchsafed to mankind. While divine revelation was as yet in its commencement, and that clear light of truth was altogether unknown which we now enjoy under the Gospel, it pleased God to keep up the notion of an invisible and better world, by sending his angels upon earth to commune with men; to instruct them in the divine will[k]; to defend them from dangers[l]; to check them in their disobedience[m]; or even to execute judgment upon the objects of God's displeasure[n]; to act, in short, as the ministers of the Almighty in the moral government of the world. Doubtless it were possible with God to carry on all his dealings with men without the intervention of other created beings. But as, in the visible world, it seemeth fit to the divine wisdom to employ instruments in the execution of its purposes, and to make mankind the channels to each other of happiness or misery, of blessings or curses, so it is reasonable to suppose that the same economy should also pervade the invisible world, and connect the whole creation by one

[k] Gen. xviii. [l] 2 Kings xix. [m] Numb. xxii.
[n] Gen. xix. 2 Sam. xxiv.

unbroken system of mutual dependence. It was partly, perhaps, to impress this truth upon our minds, that angelic visions took place in old time, and with this view that so many of them have been recorded for *our* admonition, "upon whom the ends of the world are come," and who live under a very different dispensation, with no sensible proofs, as in former times, of the visits of heavenly beings, though with the clearest assurances, in the written word of God, of the reality of such occurrences.

Besides the appearance (already alluded to) of the angels who were sent to execute vengeance upon Sodom, we read also of two hosts or encampments of angels which appeared to Jacob; of a great multitude which attended at the delivery of the law from Sinai; of the mighty army that came with horses and chariots of fire to defend the prophet Elisha from the forces of the king of Syria; and to pass over other instances, including those glorious visions of the immortal hosts of heaven with which the prophets were favoured, we have in the Gospel itself many visits recorded of angels ministering for man's salvation. On such an errand was it that the angel Gabriel descended to foretel the birth of our Lord's forerunner, and then of our Lord himself. Similar was the appearance, to the shepherds of Bethlehem, of the angel and his attendant host, who came in a luminous star to

proclaim the nativity of the Redeemer, and to rejoice with their fellow-creatures upon earth in the bright prospects opened to them of peace with God, and good-will from the common Fountain of all blessing. At a later period, when our Lord had foiled the Tempter, *angels* came and ministered to him; during his agony in the garden, an *angel* strengthened him; at his resurrection two glorious *angels* were ready to hail his return from death; and at his ascension they and myriads besides were present to grace his triumph.

The time would fail me were I to attempt to recount all the angelic visions adverted to in Scripture. It is sufficient to have reminded you of the plain historical fact, recorded in the only history which is infallibly true, that angels, yea angelic hosts, have often visited this lower world on occasions connected with the well-being of man. They have come to punish the wicked, to deliver, to defend, to instruct, the righteous, to encourage them in trouble, to sympathize with them in joy; they attended at the promulgation of the Gospel; they too announced the glad tidings of the Gospel, and ministered continually to the great work of our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such having been their actual appearances in times past, we can well believe, upon the authority of holy writ, that, although they no longer

assume a visible form, nor subject themselves to the perception of our senses, they are still, invisibly and in a spiritual manner of which we have no particular knowledge, actively engaged in the same course of benevolence towards man, as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for the sake of those who shall be heirs of salvation." There is something in this doctrine most condescendingly adapted to encourage the heart of man. For though in *holiness* they are incomparably above us, yet as they are our fellow-creatures, and not much superior in *nature*, we can understand in a more lively manner the interest which they take in our happiness, and the services which they are appointed to render. Faith is assisted by imagination, I might also say, by sense. Our spiritual succours are brought, by the aid of history, almost visibly before us. When Jacob journeyed towards Haran, he was favoured with a celestial vision, in which he beheld "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it." It is thus that the Most High is pleased to elevate our thoughts, through the ministrations of his servants, to the contemplation of himself. The summit of the scale reacheth to heaven, and the Lord standeth above it; but it is set up on the earth, and rises gradually to its height,

the angels of God ascending and descending upon it.

These holy messengers between God and man, who though already in possession of heaven, yet hesitate not to descend continually to visit and revisit earth for our sakes, we are permitted to consider as our friends and protectors, who have a charge from God to keep his servants in all their ways, and to encamp about them that fear God, and deliver them[o]. We have these assurances in the Old Testament; and lest we should think that the Gospel has made any material change in this respect, beyond the cessation of angelic visions and other sensible communications with man, we are instructed in our text that the angels, without the exception of any rank or degree, do still continue to minister for the heirs of salvation; and our Lord himself has expressly taught us, that, although many among his followers are often exposed to contempt in this world, "their angels," the angels who minister for them, do when in heaven continually behold the face of God[p].

The *nature* then of the angels is superior to that of man; their *number* is incalculable; their *holiness* unspotted; their *obedience* to the divine will animated by the most energetic *zeal*, and directed by consummate *wisdom*. They far excel

[o] Ps. xxxiv. 7. [p] Matt. xviii. 10.

us too in *power and might*, as well as in righteousness and wisdom. Amongst these exalted beings there are some more exalted than the rest, holding a princely rank in the hosts of heaven. Yet all these glorious spirits, however raised above man, and however distinguished from each other, are employed to minister to the salvation of Christians, and to punish the wickedness of the ungodly. The doctrine is sublime and mysterious, and not much perhaps practically believed in the Christian world. There may even be some amongst us who are disposed to ridicule this noble truth, being unable to raise their thoughts above the gross objects of their bodily senses, or to imagine any thing beyond the sphere of their own narrow experience. To them the spiritual world is one entire blank. They cannot look, with the eyes of faith, through the vail of their mortal nature. The doctrine of ministering angels is with them rather a *poetical fiction*, than an article of Christian truth. Not so with the true believer: to him it is a glorious, yet solemn, reality, and one, as I proposed to shew, of great practical importance, calculated to raise and refine his character, and to assist him in preparing to associate in heaven with those superior beings, with whom he holds already an imperfect communion on earth.

III. To the consideration of this point, viz. the

practical importance of believing in the existence and ministry of angels, let us now, in the third and last place, proceed.

In a practical light, we may first of all consider the angels as *beings of a superior order* to ourselves; and regarding them in this view, we might for a moment be tempted to look up to them, with more than reverence, as objects of our lawful adoration. But the worship of angels is strictly forbidden by God, and abhorred by themselves. "See thou do it not!" is the warning of the angel to St. John; "for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren: worship God." The angels are creatures like ourselves, and instruments only under God, not the sources of our blessings. The highest of these heavenly beings is, together with us, a worshipper of the Son of God[q]. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the mysterious object of their adoration, as well as ours, cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy, acknowledging the Three divine Persons to be the One only Lord, who is God of all the hosts of being, in heaven as well as upon earth.

But although we may not worship the angels, we shall do well to remember that they are vastly superior to mankind; that accordingly they deserve our admiration; and that, if they

[q] Heb. i. 6.

interest themselves about us, their opinion is of much more value than the opinion of human beings, who in every respect are so much their inferiors. Now St. Paul expressly declares, that "we are made a spectacle to angels;" and it is intimated in more than one part of Scripture, that the concerns of mankind form a subject of intense interest among the higher orders of creation. May we not derive from hence a powerful antidote to that overweening love of human applause, from which much of our spiritual danger arises? How often are we led astray by too great a regard to the sentiments of our fellow-creatures upon earth! Human opinion, at the best, is liable to error; the judgment even of wise and good men is not always according to truth; and that of the multitude, how strangely perverse do we sometimes find it, converting trifles into objects of the highest moment, and treating as trivial our most important concerns! How much better is it to seek the good opinion of beings who are not subject to these imperfections, and errors, and perversions of judgment! Study then to consider yourself as living not only amongst sinful and erring mortals, but as surrounded by multitudes of holy angels, who are free both from sin and folly. If men by their levity and thoughtlessness would encourage you in sin, reflect how differently the angels must think, who rejoice unspeakably "over a sinner that repenteth!" If

men by their advice or their example urge you to devote yourself to the pursuit of the splendour which attends upon wealth or earthly distinctions, remember that true "honour and glory" before God and his angels is to be sought only "by patient continuance in well-doing." Such is the glory which the Scriptures exhort us to pursue, and such the method which they point out for its attainment. When St. Paul was giving instructions to Timothy how to conduct himself in the discharge of his episcopal duties in the Church of Ephesus, he enforced his commands by the following emphatic exhortation: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the *elect angels*, that thou observe these things." He represents our conduct as open to the observation of the whole court of heaven, urging us to consider the judgment which is *there* formed of our character, as of infinitely greater importance than the views which may be taken of it upon earth. We talk indeed of the *opinion of the world*, as if there were no *world* but the present; no *opinion* to be valued but that of our sinful race; no public honours, or public disgrace, but the transitory distinctions and reproach of men! Let us open our eyes to the real state of things; let us dart one glance of faith into the spiritual world, and view the myriads of exalted spectators who are regarding our conduct. A day is coming when

the vail will be drawn aside, which now hides the spiritual world from us, when we shall most ardently desire that glory before the celestial hosts, which we now treat as if it were something unreal and imaginary, and when no disgrace will be thought so great, as to be "denied" by Christ "before the angels of God," and put to shame in the presence of that august assembly.

The holy angels may farther be considered as *examples* for our imitation. We pray that we may do the will of God in earth, as they do it in heaven. What we pray, we must endeavour to practise. The angels are distinguished by their zeal and activity in doing universally the pleasure of the Most High. Though incomparably greater than we are, they do not, as we do, set up a will of their own against that of their Maker, but perform "the commandments of the Lord, and hearken unto the voice of his word[r]." How indignant must they feel, or, if incapable of such a feeling, with what mingled pity and sorrow must they contemplate the infatuated arrogance of man, in making light of God's word, and despising his commandments!

Besides the general alacrity of the angels in executing the divine will, they are remarkable, in particular, for their *devotion*. The highest among

[r] Psalm ciii. 20.

them do not think themselves demeaned by the prostration of their immortal crowns before the throne of God. They refuse not to remember their Creator continually, and to mingle with all their employments, their joys, or their glories, the voice of unceasing gratitude and adoration to the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity.

The angels evince a great *interest in the Gospel.* Its mysteries are things which they "desire to look into." How must they wonder at our indifference, who, though the immediate objects of this redemption, yet scarcely give it a thought, much less enquire, with anxious interest and devout adoration, into the wonderful scheme which infinite love suggested, which infinite wisdom planned, and which infinite power is still accomplishing, for our recovery from sin and sorrow! With the angels, the Gospel-dispensation furnishes a sublime excitement to their intelligence and devotion, and as such they *desire* to look into it. With us, "to know God and his Son Jesus Christ is eternal life." Our everlasting salvation depends upon it; yet we neglect the subject as if we had nothing to do with it, and as if the Christian redemption had been wrought for the angels, and not for us. How many are there who even strip the Gospel of all those glorious peculiarities which make it the theme of angelic admiration, as connected with "the sufferings of Christ and the glory which should follow, glory

for fallen man restored to grace, glory which surrounds the brow of the Redeemer, and glory which shall redound for ever to the attributes of God!

The angels, again, are distinguished by *meekness*. The archangel Michael, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring even against him a railing accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke thee.' With what horror must such beings regard the opprobrious language, the gross invectives, the railing accusations without number to be heard among Christians, not against the great enemy of God and man, but against each other!

Once more, the angels furnish us with a striking example of *humility*. Pride, as I have already observed, is unknown in heaven. Our Lord has set before us a pattern of infinite humility in his incarnation, sufferings, and death, a pattern which in a lower degree his angels copy. They also condescend to our low estate, by interesting themselves in our concerns, and ministering to our salvation, thereby instructing us not to be high-minded, and puffed up with any distinctions of wisdom, or rank, or power, or virtue, but to be ready to sympathize with our inferiors, and gladly to do them service. The difference between the highest and lowest among men, is trivial in comparison with that which

chased for us in heaven. And in the last place, viewing the angels as *ministering spirits*, we learn not to despise our meanest brethren, nor to fear our greatest enemies: we learn also to apply ourselves to the work of our salvation with an increased sense of its unspeakable importance, lest we should be abandoned by them in disappointment, instead of becoming like to them in character upon earth, applauded by them at the day of judgment, and similar, if not equal, to them in the glories of the world to come.

SERMON XVI.

OUR PRESENT BEING.

JAM. iv. 14.

What is your life?

THE question in my text is clearly a most interesting one; one which must frequently have occurred to every reflecting person. We cannot but be deeply concerned to know what kind of life it is that we are living. At this season in particular, when another year of our lives has come to its close, another portion of our existence passed away, it presents itself to us with a peculiar propriety. What then is our life? What in regard to its *duration?* will it be long or short? What in regard to the *possession* of it? Is it such as we can ourselves command, or is it held at the will of another? Above all, what is it in regard to its *intention?* for what purposes do we enjoy life? Important considerations these, which no individual can neglect without discredit to himself as a thinking, or without danger to him-

self as an active, being. Suffer me, therefore, to solicit your attention to the enquiries which I have just suggested, and to a few practical inferences naturally flowing from them.

I. In the first place, what in point of *duration* is human life? long or short? But this is a needless question to ask. Experience has long ago decided it for us; whilst Scripture continually reminds us, that our days are but "a handbreadth," "swifter than a post," passing away as a "ship" before the gale, spent like "a tale that is told," or transient as a vapour which appears for a little time and is then dispelled. Such is our life as described in the book of inspiration. To ourselves it may often appear long, and especially in prospect. We look forward to an indefinite period of existence, without ever realizing, in our own case, the idea of a close. We think of living year after year, without reflecting that in some one of those years, upon which we reckon, our life must actually end. Thus, whilst we all join in acknowledging that life is short, yet practically we make it eternal. This is a distinction worth noticing; the distinction I mean between the verbal acknowledgment, and practical persuasion of a truth. A person, for instance, who really feels life to be short, does not content himself with general lamentations concerning its brevity; but will often picture

to himself his own death as actually taking place. "If I am to die," he will say, "as I know I must, then unquestionably the time of this event is drawing nearer daily; perhaps, it will occur in one of those years, upon which I have been calculating for the accomplishment of some of my earthly plans; possibly, before twelve more months shall have rolled by, I shall have bid adieu to this sublunary world, and my place here be no more known; or it may be that this month, this week, this very night, my soul may be required of me." These are thoughts to which a practical persuasion of the shortness of life naturally leads: thoughts which in the freshness of youth, or in the vigour of health, may appear unnecessary, and which the healthy and the young seldom entertain, yet thoughts which in no one are unseasonable, but important alike to all. For to all life is but a vapour: and unless we do, in some such way as this, endeavour to impress upon our minds the idea of death's actual coming, we cannot well be said to believe what we say concerning the brevity of our existence. Our declarations must be considered as mere words of course, without any substantial signification; the mere utterance of the tongue, not the fixed persuasion of the mind. If life is really short, it is short to ourselves as well as to others; and we cannot avoid dying soon, any more than our predecessors have done before us. It is this

personal application of truth to our own case, that makes it of any practical value.

II. In the same manner also should we consider the *second* question which was proposed, concerning the possession or rather the *uncertainty* of life; not to establish the truth, (for this is not disputed,) but to *impress* it upon our minds; to familiarize it to our thoughts and feelings; until they become practically under its influence. We all know, that it is quite uncertain what shall be on the morrow; that a day may bring forth the most strange vicissitudes; and that we may not be alive to witness them. In looking back on the past year, we can, probably, call to mind instances, more than one, of individuals, who, at its commencement, were healthy and strong, and who as little thought of leaving this world before the present time, as we do of being called away before the close of the ensuing year. How forcibly does this consideration urge upon us the wisdom, nay, the absolute necessity, of not reckoning with any feeling of certainty upon the continuance of our lives here below, even for a single day! We are inclined to think and act, as if time were at our own disposal. We promise ourselves the accomplishment of many projects, during years, which, we suppose, are yet in store for us. Meanwhile we forget too much our entire dependence upon God, not only for success in our

plans, but for the very extension of our life. It is with reference to this folly, that the words of my text were originally spoken. "Go to now, ye that say to day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? it is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away: for that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings, all such rejoicing is evil."

III. In the third place we were to consider the *purposes* for which a life so short and uncertain has been allotted to us.

And here it is a natural enquiry, whether the purpose of our life is *present enjoyment*. The desire of happiness is deeply rooted in the minds of all. Enjoyment under some form or other is the great object of pursuit to every human being. Nor is the object in itself to be condemned: on the contrary, the endeavour to be happy is at once our interest, and our duty. But whilst happiness is to be considered as the great end of our being, it may well be questioned whether it be the immediate purpose of the present life, or one to the attainment of which we are not to look forward until our arrival in a HIGHER and a BETTER state. The very shortness of this life,

and also its uncertainty, plainly shew, that enjoyment is not the *great* end and purpose for which it was designed. The experience too of mankind bears testimony to the same truth. We meet with none, we hear of none, we read of none, whose cup has been free from bitterness. Trouble under some or other of its many forms is a part of the inheritance of all the children of Adam. To the same effect we are taught in Scripture, that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of heaven; and that God scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: and that not only the children of God, but every man, is born to trouble. Nothing therefore can be more fallacious than to expect to experience here below a life of unmixed enjoyment. For a share of affliction we must be prepared; it is inseparable from existence. But on the other hand let us not indulge too gloomy a view of this present being. For certain wise and gracious ends, with some of which we have been made acquainted, whilst others perhaps still remain to be revealed, it has pleased the Almighty to appoint the existence of much affliction to us in our earthly sojourn. But in his mercy He has not made it one dark night of woe, without a joy to relieve, or a hope to cheer it. On the contrary, if we observe life correctly, we find it to be of a very mixed character, chequered with good and evil, and abounding more upon the whole

with blessings, than with afflictions. Some indeed there are who have little or no enjoyment of their present existence, and whose days seem to be one uninterrupted course of comfortless dissatisfaction. But whence does this arise? Is it not from their own folly or sin? from want of prudence, or from want of principle? from neglecting it may be the service of God in Jesus Christ, and living not under the influence of religion, but in obedience to appetite and passion, or for the sole pursuit of worldly objects? Or if they are pious, perhaps they may have suffered themselves to take up superstitious views of religion, and so have embittered their lives, with unworthy views of God and his service; or it may be, that they have set their minds immoderately upon present enjoyments, destroying them by too much fondness, and treasuring up for themselves disappointment, by overstrained expectations. If such be the manner in which we have sought to enjoy our present life, we must not wonder at our ill success. With sin and folly, happiness is inconsistent: the want of Christian piety, the existence of superstition, or an excessive desire of present enjoyment, disqualifies us for attaining it. If we would use this world as not abusing it, and so enjoy it with sobriety, as far as it is really capable of being enjoyed, our first object should be to raise our minds *above it;* to remember that it is but short,

and withal how uncertain! that enjoyment therefore must not be made its great object; but that if pursued with moderated desires, without any excessive fondness, and always in the path of Christian duty, it may, through the mercy of divine Providence, fall to our lot. From some indeed it may please God to withhold almost entirely the happiness, or at least the prosperity, of this present life; even perhaps when their principles and conduct have been such as we have just described, moderated, virtuous, Christian. If such be the lot of any, let them not grieve. Better things are in store for them. What time has withheld, eternity shall bestow. The blessing shall not suffer from delay. With abundant interest from the coffers of heaven shall the rich treasure be dispensed to them hereafter, when time shall be no more.

It appears then that *enjoyment* is not the great end of our present being. Godliness it is true has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come; and the true Christian may always depend upon one blessing, even peace of mind, if not upon a greater share of the substantial satisfactions of life, than the bulk of mankind. But this perhaps will always be in proportion to the moderation of his desires. An anxious longing for earthly good, will at once render that good dangerous to himself, and himself unfit for its enjoyment. The course which the Scriptures

seem to prescribe in this case, is cheerfully to commit ourselves in faith and well-doing into the hands of God; to view all the unavoidable events of life as the appointment of his fatherly loving-kindness; if he sends adversity, to make it an occasion not of desponding grief but of profitable consideration; if he prospers us, to be thankful and rejoice; yet in all earthly prosperity to rejoice with moderation, with humility, with an increased zeal in the service of God, with kind sympathy for those who are in distress, and with a spirit of strict watchfulness, lest we be led by present blessings to forget our God, our Saviour, and our duty. And whilst the prosperous Christian does *thus* rejoice in his prosperity, as Scripture not only allows but commands him to do, he will take care to consider it only as *present*, and not to depend upon it for the future. The blessings which he enjoys may be continued to him, or they may not. The issue, he knows, rests with God, and not with himself: and there he gladly leaves it, only taking care, by the grace of God, so to live in sincere though imperfect piety, that his blessings may not by any habitual disobedience be forfeited, even if they are withdrawn. A refusal to rejoice soberly in the prosperity which God is pleased to bestow upon us, seems too much allied to unthankfulness, and a kind of suspicious distrust of the divine goodness; whilst so far from shewing a mind raised

above the world, it rather implies an excessive fondness for it. For what is the real reason of our dissatisfaction in such cases? is it not that we think our blessings either too few, or too uncertain? is it not that we would fain have them greater and more permanent, and are therefore discontented? and what is this but an overweening fondness for earthly good? whereas to be contented with such happiness as our heavenly Father sees fit for us, and implicitly to acquiesce in his providence with regard to the future, shews a Christian superiority to present things, removed, both from thankless insensibility on the one hand, and on the other, from worldly solicitude.

But it is time that we should proceed to higher considerations. For enjoyment, we have said, is not the end of this present life, but only a secondary object, which sometimes, it may be, is withheld from the best Christian, though generally the result of piety and virtue. What then are the great purposes of our being? What the objects which we are chiefly to pursue? The Scriptures reply, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Let this be your chief anxiety, your great end and aim. This is the purpose for which life has been given you; this the one thing needful, in comparison of which all other pursuits are trivial, and the neglect of which must infallibly bring with it bitter disappointment even

now, and in the world to come confusion and woe. Viewed thus, as the season for securing an interest in the kingdom of God, his kingdom of grace here, and glory hereafter, by seeking his righteousness, even the righteousness which he has provided for us in the faith of Christ, and which consists in accepting us through him, by pardon, and in renewing us unto holiness by his blessed Spirit. Viewed thus, as the opportunity which we enjoy of becoming reconciled to God, and conformed to his will, this life is no longer represented to us as in any respect trifling and unimportant. As a season of enjoyment, we cannot have too strongly impressed upon our minds how short and uncertain it is, and how little worthy of the supreme affection of a soul which is immortal! On the other hand, looking upon it as a *season of probation* and improvement, we cannot set its value too high. In the one case we speak of it as a post that passes swiftly by, as a ship that hastens away, as a tale that interests us for an hour and is then forgotten, as a vapour that appeareth in the air for a little time and vanisheth away. But if we look to the *end* of life, to its consequences hereafter, it then becomes *a journey*, *a race*, *a fight*, for holy victory. It is under these characters that we should chiefly consider our life below.

In the first place, it is a *journey*, a pilgrimage through a strange country to a distant home.

This view is not peculiar to the Christian. It is that which the faithful of all ages have adopted. "They confessed," as we are taught to do, "that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth:" this the apostle declares concerning the earliest patriarchs; "truly," he adds, "if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to return: but now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly." The same should our views be. We should consider, that "whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" at a distance from our father's house, which is our true home; that "here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come."

Our life is also a *race*, which we are running for the attainment of a prize. "I have finished my course," saith the apostle, "and henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all those who love his appearing." In the ancient foot-race it was the custom to reward the victor with a crown. It is to this practice that St. Paul alludes. And the same comparison of the Christian life to a course or race he makes in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he exhorts us "so to run that we may obtain;" adding for our encouragement, that the crown proposed to us is not a fading one,

like that contended for by those who run in the games, but one of imperishable value. "Now they do it," he observes, "to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." Thus is the life of every Christian a race in which he is engaged, and at the close of which, those who shall have run successfully will obtain a crown of unfading glory. But in every race, much present discipline is necessary, as well as strenuous exertion in the course itself. So it is in the Christian race of righteousness, to which the crown of glory is proposed. In order to run successfully, we must come prepared by meditation and prayer, and the other means of grace; thus prepared, thus braced in our minds and strengthened, we shall be able, in Christian faith, to run perseveringly the way of God's commandments; so as to obtain the crown, which the Lord has promised to such of his disciples as run, with patience, the race that is set before them.

Again, our life is compared to *a fight*; "a good" or honourable "fight," which we are waging against our great enemy sin, both for safety and for glory. The comparison of a pilgrimage carries with it the idea of fatigue, and constant perseverance; in a race we need much care, and constant exertion, whilst a fight calls moreover for firmness and vigilance. And such we see is our life.

But is it thus that Christians in general view it? Is it thus, for instance, that we have been living during the time we have already spent? This is the surest test we can adopt, to try the safety of our condition. How then have we been passing the time of this short and uncertain life? What views have we taken of it? And to what ends have we been employing it? Has our aim been only to make the most of it for present enjoyment; to spend our days not so much profitably as pleasantly, or at least in the pursuit of some object which shall fail us when our life terminates? To do so is practically to forget what our life really is; to forget that it is not abiding in itself, but like *a pilgrimage*, in which we ought to be continually advancing towards our heavenly home; and not seeking to take up our abode by the way. Is it as such we have been employing it? or have we instead been lingering and loitering in our journey, and mistaking earth for our home? Again, life is *a race;* a race of righteousness for a crown of glory. Have we been amongst the competitors? Have we been striving and pressing forward to the prize of our high calling in Jesus Christ? Have our eyes been fixed upon the goal, and our feet hastening to it? Finally, the life of Christians is a fight, a battle, *a warfare.* Now during the time past against what have we been fighting? Is it against each other, in uncharitable debate and strife, in envy

and slander? Is it against the ways of religion, and truth, and virtue, by ridicule, and scoffing, and clamour? Or have we really been fighting against sin? been opposing its prevalence, and especially in ourselves? Have we really been struggling against a corrupt nature, and subduing our evil habits? Can we look back and say, that our tempers are improved, our passions and appetites brought more under control, our spirit humbled, or our affections raised more decidedly to the things of another world? If this has not in some measure been the case, the time past has been utterly thrown away by us. We have mistaken the nature of our life, neglected its uses, and as Christians have yet to begin to live. What an account will time, thus spent, give in the court of Heaven, against those who have thus abused it?

Even those Christians who do consider and employ their life as a pilgrimage, a race, and a warfare, have yet much to lament in looking back upon their life at its close; much for which they need to implore their Saviour's intercession. When they compare themselves at present, with what they were at the close of the preceding year, how few are there, whose progress in their journey has been at all considerable, whose speed in the race has increased, or whose success in combating sin has been in any degree proportioned to the time! Time revolves, and returns

again to the same point; and so, alas! do we. May another year be happier to us! To those who have neglected the Christian life may it be the beginning of their fight, their race, their journey! And to all may it bring with it a nearer approach to God, through his Son Jesus Christ; a more rapid advancement in holiness and peace; a brighter hope of glory hereafter!

SERMON XVII.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

2 Cor. v. 10.

We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

EVERY reasonable and thoughtful person will naturally be anxious concerning the intention and end of his being. He will frequently put to himself questions like the following: 'What am I? For what am I intended? With what design am I to believe that my Maker formed me? When another age shall have gone by, one more century have passed away, where and in what state shall I be?' These are questions which concern us all; and which none can neglect, but those who would live like irrational beings, regardless of the future, and committing the fate of their souls to a dreary and dark uncertainty. Too many, it is true, live in this awful state of unconcern; but that does not diminish the danger of it. If the whole world besides neglected their future welfare, this would be no reason for us to do the

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same. It would still be equally our duty and our interest to look to things to come, and not to suffer the example of multitudes to lead us into ruin, to drown us in a wretched thoughtlessness concerning what shall be hereafter.

Now the Scriptures offer to us "eternal life" as the gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ: they teach us, that the will of God is, not that we should perish like the beasts of the field, or, still worse, in the flame that is never quenched, but that we should '*all* come to repentance,' and live for ever[a]. This then is the end and intention of our being; the great object for which our present life was given us; the great subject to which every wise man, and above all every Christian, should mainly direct both his thoughts and his endeavours. What avails it any man if he should gain the whole of this present world, yet lose his immortal soul? if he should be rich, or great, or happy, here, enjoy health, and ease, and pleasure, yet fail of heaven? The great question, after all, is, what will become of us when we die? Shall we, as a matter of necessity, inherit that life to which we have been all invited? Or *may* we not, by abandoning the Christian character, forego also the Christian hope? If we give up the pure faith and holy practice of the Gospel, shall we not, at the same time, relinquish

[a] 2 Pet. iii. 9.

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But if this was the case with St. Paul, and if the tone of the New Testament is similar throughout, surely it teaches us, that the expectation of the great day should be familiar to the mind of every Christian; should direct his views; should regulate his estimate of present things; should occupy his thoughts; should awaken his fears; should animate his hopes; should rouse his activity; in short, should be to him a ruling principle of thinking, and feeling, and acting; a principle such as influenced the Church in its best days, and filled with unwearied zeal one and all of its apostles. Those holy men had their eyes continually directed forward to his return in glory, whom they had once fled

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judgment is continually on the lips and the pen of St. Paul. His conversation with Felix was concerning "righteousness, and temperance, and *judgment to come:*" his preaching at Athens, that "God hath appointed a day in which he will *judge the world*, in righteousness, by the Man whom he hath ordained." He speaks of Christians as *looking forward to the coming of Christ* with joy, and exhorts them to *wait for it* with patience. When he thought of the corruption of mankind, and the danger of sin, he "endeavoured to persuade men" to embrace his Gospel, "knowing *the terror of the Lord*" against the disobedient. In his labours he was supported by the expectation that Christ would *reward* him *at his appearing;* "We labour," he says, "that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him: for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." If his conduct was misunderstood and misrepresented, he did not distress himself with unavailing anxiety, or indulge in clamorous complaint, but consoled himself with reflecting, that human judgments are comparatively unimportant, and that the great object of a Christian should be, to seek the merciful approbation of his gracious Lord hereafter. "With me," he says, "it is a small thing that I be judged of you, or of man's judg-

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from and forsaken, as he bore the ignominious cross. *They* regulated their lives by a constant regard to the second coming of their Master to judge the world. The question for us to consider is, whether *we* ought to do the same. Many circumstances in the conduct of the apostles were peculiar to their apostolic character. To imitate them in these would oftentimes be folly, and sometimes presumption. But in living as accountable beings, in regarding themselves as servants of a Master who would return to reckon with them for talents entrusted to their care, they thought not as apostles, but as Christians. It is not the apostles alone who are to appear before Christ in judgment. The occasion will be equally interesting to all mankind, and to ourselves amongst the rest. That assembly will be collected from all nations and languages, from all times and countries, of all denominations and conditions of men. There we shall all appear; however separated by distance here below, however distinguished from each other by station, or occupation, or circumstances, we shall, every one, have to present ourselves before Christ, to give to him an account of what we are now doing upon earth. The people shall be there, together with their minister: you, my brethren, that it may appear what use you have made of the means of grace, in what manner you have received instruction, how far you have consulted

God's word, kept holy his sabbaths, observed his sacraments, obeyed the voice of conscience, trusted in the blood of Christ for the pardon of your sins, looked to his intercession for acceptance with God, to his Spirit for sanctification, to his precepts and his example for the regulation of your lives, to his promises for consolation and encouragement; in a word, my brethren, in that day, as the ministers of Christ will have a peculiarly solemn account to give of the fidelity with which they have discharged their momentous trust, of their zeal for their Master's glory, their exertions for the salvation of souls; so shall we all, both ministers and people, have to answer, each for himself, concerning the progress we have made in true Christian faith and practice, and the consistency of our lives with that holy profession of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we all claim as our glory. If, in that solemn day, you shall be found to have been Christians not in word only, but in deed and in truth, to have made religion not merely a profession, but the great concern of your being, the moving spring of your life, the one thing preeminently needful, the pearl of great price, the invaluable treasure which is worth more than the whole field of this world besides, then happy will ye be. The Lord will pronounce to you that unspeakably welcome invitation, "Come, ye blessed children of my

except by embracing the appointed way of salvation through Christ, by repentance, faith, and holy living. What are tempests or thunder storms, earthquakes or volcanoes, to the rolling up of the heavens as a scroll, the convulsion of all nature, the wreck of elements, the crash of falling worlds, and the utter destruction of heaven and earth amidst the consuming flames? We ought now to be preparing for that awful scene, by securing in time our interest in the merits of the Son of God. We ought daily to be advancing in that lively faith in Christ, that entire sincerity of heart before God, that unfeigned earnestness in the cause of piety, righteousness, and purity, that scriptural communion with God's Holy Spirit, which shall justify us on all occasions, however fearful in themselves, in looking up to God, not indeed without awe, yet with tranquil confidence in his mercy, and a joyful hope of eventually enjoying it. To a man thus established in a dependence through Christ upon the divine favour, no scenes will be overwhelmingly terrific, no losses intolerable; for the Lord himself is his shield, and the portion of his inheritance. He commits himself to the supreme King and Governor of the world, to the Saviour and Judge of men, and will fear no evil. Oh! that we could attain (and, praised be God, by his grace we may attain) to this degree of pious confidence in Him, "with whom is everlasting strength, and

of Christ—present peace and joy, and finally an all-unmerited, but certain and overflowing, reward.

But there is an alternative, an awful alternative, before you. If you resolve, through the grace of God, to live by the faith of the Son of God, and to serve him as your future Judge, the end will be joyful and full of glory: but how dreadful is it to think, that by vice, by profaneness, nay more, by thoughtless unconcern for religion, and an overweening preference for present things, we may forfeit all the hopes of which we have been speaking, and incur instead a sentence of woe and everlasting misery! Oh! think how intolerable it would be to see the children of God ascending to the kingdom of their Father, the servants of Christ entering into the joy of their Lord, and yourselves cast out! to hear addressed to you, not the invitation to bliss and glory, to joy and triumph, but, instead, a stern and irreversible decree of woe, woe, woe: "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" Yet this dreadful curse will be pronounced upon the irreligious and disobedient; and who amongst us would be able to bear it? What heart so stout, that would not quail, and tremble, and sink, at such a sentence from Him, who would follow it up with instant execution? Who could dwell with everlasting burnings? Now the scorner is bold, and the

thoughtless make light of sin; but it will not be so then. No! they will cry unto the rocks to fall on them, and to the hills to cover them; they will wish for any thing rather than the wrath of Him, whose name they here dishonour, whose religion they neglect, whose offers of mercy they refuse, whose yoke they shake off, and exclaim, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'

Such are the prospects not only of the notoriously profligate, the openly vicious, the avowedly irreligious, but even of the thoughtless and worldly-minded; of every one, in short, who does not previously take sanctuary at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and look for the fulfilment of his gracious promises in a course of sincere obedience to his precepts of faith, and hope, and charity.

But whilst, in fidelity to our hearers, though with pain to ourselves, we do thus declare 'the terror of the Lord,' as well as the 'glory which shall be revealed,' allow us, my brethren, to look for better things from you, and to cherish the hope, that even the words which are now addressed to you, may be a means, under divine grace, of confirming you in fixed principles of piety and virtue. Strive to enter in at the straight gate: strive to secure the merciful approbation of our blessed Lord, and to avert that dreadful curse which some will receive at the day of judgment.

In conclusion, suffer me to sum up the reflexions which have been made under two particular heads.

First, let us learn to estimate aright this present life with all its changes and chances.

The scene in which we are now placed is continually shifting. Joy succeeds sorrow, and sorrow joy. Sometimes they come hand in hand together, as if to check, at once, all immoderate grief or happiness drawn from present things. We are ignorant what we shall have, or where we shall be, on the morrow. We lose our friends by death, and know not how soon we may follow them; we are separated by distance, and cannot tell how long it may be, or how short a time, before we see them again. Adversity befalls us, but presently the cloud is removed, and the sky again is clear. Prosperity comes, but it also is liable to change, and is chastened by trials. Now in all this vicissitude, this chequering of good and evil, how elated at one time, and how depressed at another, is the heart to which sound and enlightened piety is a stranger! But if we look to "the end of all things," to the great goal of our race, to the judgment-day, how different do our views become! From thence we learn, that, comparatively speaking, one thing only is needful, which is to prepare to meet the Lord and his angels with joy at his appearing. If our happi-

ness is independent of this hope, it will soon fade and fail us: if our sorrows overstep this limit, they become unwise and sinful. The Christian, in all present things, is taught *to rejoice* with the recollection of the infinitely greater value of religious satisfactions, and to *grieve* with a hope and confidence in God, that his mercy will be with him all the days of his life; that the afflictions of this world, though grievous, are transitory no less than its joys, and that they often give place to prosperous circumstances when we least expect it. In short, look upon life as a journey, and you will not overrate either its good or evil; you will be content to enjoy the one as a traveller does the passing comforts and gratifications he meets with on his way; to bear the other, as molestations which will be over when you reach your home. Here we are strangers; as strangers let us live, and not as if the things of our pilgrimage were to be for ever. But this leads me to my *second* and final consideration.

For from the prospect we have been taking of the great scope of our being, we should learn to make our chief concern the *preparation for eternity*. Whatever we are in this world we shall soon cease to be. The things that permanently concern us are religion and virtue: *religion*, even that of the incarnate Son of God, the religion of

the Gospel, whose "end is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned;" whose teaching is that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly," whose handmaids are "faith, hope, and charity." Let this be your religion, and then your virtue will be sincere; not cultivated merely to please men, or to gain their praise; but cordial and deep, flowing through the various channels of your conduct in every thing that is lovely and of good report, from an earnest desire to please God through Jesus Christ, and to gain at the day of account his indulgent approbation; yea, his gracious and glorious and everlasting rewards.

May these things be our care, then happy shall we be wheresoever we are, and however circumstanced. Sorrows may befal us, but we shall know how to bear them: joys may refresh our journey, but our chief happiness will be in the hope of glory. For the season is fast approaching, when all true Christians shall meet without pain or sorrow, or fear of their occurrence, to encompass with songs of gratitude and with hymns of triumph the throne of their common Lord. Through the great mercy of God in Jesus Christ, may these prospects be realized to each one of us: "only let our conduct be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ," that "in that hour in which they that have done good shall

ing influence, much greater than what belongs to bare instruction. It is scarcely possible for a human being not to assume the manners and practices, and, in some degree, the principles, of those with whom he is conversant. His mind, no less than his body, is susceptible of contagion, and happily for him, in the case of his mind, health is infectious, as well as sickness.

Hence it becomes an object of so much importance to secure to ourselves valuable society; and by means of the records of past ages, to cultivate an acquaintance not merely with living, but with departed excellence; and to associate with the wise and good of other times and countries, as well as of our own. From them we may seize, not the bare letter, but the living spirit, of our duty; and by frequent intercourse with such companions, may gradually find our own minds strung to the same tone, filled with the same desires, and raised above the allurements and obstacles which surround us, to a love and participation of their virtues.

It may be thought, indeed, that to the Christian there is one, and one only, model, after which he should form himself; that our blessed Lord, in gracious condescension to our nature, having "left us an example that we should follow his steps," all other patterns are hereby superseded. But, upon the same principle, it might also be contended, that the Bible is the only book,

on religious and moral subjects, to which our attention should be directed. The example of Christ is alone *perfect*, as the book of God is alone *unerring;* and it is "by looking unto Him, who is the author and finisher of our *faith*," that we shall be *best* enabled to "run with patience" and rectitude "the race that is set before us." But to assist us in this great object of imitating our blessed Lord, we are exhorted in Scripture to emulate those patterns of sincere, though infinitely inferior, excellence, with which we are furnished in the examples of his servants. "Be ye followers of me," the apostle writes to his Corinthian converts, "even as I am also of Christ;" or as he more forcibly expresses it, in an earlier part of the same Epistle, "I beseech you, be ye followers of me." Similar exhortations occur in other parts of the sacred volume, inciting the Christian to "follow those, who have already through faith and patience inherited the promises," and to "take for an example the prophets," whom God had honoured with the commission of his word, and the patriarchs also of less favoured times.

In addition then to the all-perfect and unapproachable pattern of the Son of God, the examples of such as have been distinguished by obedience to the divine will, though short of perfection, and not unmixed with faults, are to be made our study for the purpose of imitation.

first sight impress us with a serious enquiry as to the cause of such order and contrivance. If still farther, instead of taking a superficial view, we pursue the research more attentively, we shall meet at each step in our progress with fresh and overwhelming reasons to acknowledge the wisdom of our structure, and be led to exclaim with mingled awe and admiration, that we are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made."

On extending our observations from ourselves to the universe around us, the same design and contrivance, the same adaptation of means to an end, the same harmonious order, present themselves on every side. The contrivance and power exhibited in the commonest insect or plant are such, as to render altogether contemptible the most admired imitation of them which human ingenuity and labour have ever effected. If we add to this the infinite variety of such productions, both animate and inanimate; the nice gradation of being which surrounds them; the provision made for the sustenance of all from the meanest herb to the noblest amongst the sons of man, can we forbear acknowledging herein traces of wisdom, and power, and goodness, which, though hidden from our view, are yet in their effects so clearly discernible? Were there only one sensitive or one vegetable production in the whole world, only one quadruped or one tree, how would men flock together to admire it! and

how astonished should we be at the wisdom and power displayed in its organization and support! What should increase, diminishes our wonder! Because the instances have not been solitary, but continued through a long series of ages, and have been moreover in every age infinitely beyond all number; because in fact there is neither interruption nor limit to these works of wonder, we are for this very reason disposed to regard them without emotion, and to become insensible to those proofs of a divine presence which should impress us the more forcibly, in proportion as they are more numerous and more common.

We are ready indeed to condemn with indignation the professed atheist or idolater, and to exclaim in the beautiful language of the book of wisdom, that "surely, vain are all men by nature who are ignorant of God, and cannot, out of the good things that are seen, know him that is: neither, by considering the *works*, did they acknowledge the *work-master*, but deemed either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the violent water, or the lights of heaven, to be the gods that govern the world. With whose beauty if they, being delighted, took them to be gods, let them know how much better the *Lord* of them is; for the first Author of beauty hath created them. But if they were astonished at *their* power and virtue, let them understand by them, how much mightier *He* is that made

them. For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures, proportionably the maker of them is seen[a]." We acknowledge with St. Paul, "the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein, hath not left himself without witness[b]." But "since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes, even his eternal power and Godhead, have been clearly exhibited to us, being understood by the things that are made; so that" both the atheist who denies his existence, and the idolater who dishonours his nature, are equally "without excuse[c]."

But is there no species of unbelief short of atheism, or idolatry? Is there no practical forgetfulness and ignorance of our Creator? We live as it were in the midst of the temple of God. His hand is palpably present in every thing we see. His name is written on every part of the universe; it shines forth in the firmament, and is traced on the insect's wing. The whole world is but the tabernacle of the Most High; like its type in the Jewish church, it consists of two parts, divided from each other by the veil of our mortal nature. In heaven, the "holy of holies," beyond that veil, God is invisibly present, and the brightness of his glory is overpowering. Here below, on this side the veil, in the outer

[a] Wisd. xiii. 1—5. [b] Acts xiv. 15, &c. [c] Rom. i. 20.

SERMON XVIII.

THE RELIGIOUS USE OF STORMS AND TEMPESTS.

JER. IX. 23, 24.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

WE all agree in acknowledging, as a fundamental part of our religion, that it is impossible to reflect upon ourselves, or to survey the world around us, without perceiving the clearest indications of some mysterious power vastly superior to both. The astonishing mechanism of our frame, the adaptation of each of its several parts to some specific end, and at the same time the harmonious concurrence of them all to the general purposes of human life and action, must even at

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afterwards, and that you might for the rest of your life serve more faithfully the God of all power and might. It is with a view of promoting this object, that I have been anxious to draw your attention back to the awful visitations which we have lately witnessed, and to convince you, if conviction be necessary, that it is our solemn duty to improve such events to religious purposes.

I. The first impression of a religious nature produced by storms and tempests is that of awe or terror. They are doubtless to be considered as having their origin chiefly in the divine displeasure. Had sin never entered the world, these terrific exhibitions of almighty power would have been unknown. Natural evils imply moral ones. The voice of the thunder was never heard in Eden. The trees of paradise were never shattered by the lightning or uprooted by the tempest. The power of the Omnipotent was then displayed in uninterrupted acts of unbounded goodness. It was sin that brought in its train not only death, the greatest of all natural ills, but even other calamities to which we are liable. But although the evils of nature are the consequences of man's offence, calculated to remind us of our sins, and to humble us before the divine Majesty, far be it that we should arrogantly interpret any particular visita-

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natural world are calculated to impress us with terror, and to lead us to repentance. They are the frowns of the Omnipotent, which it is madness in man to regard without emotion.

But justice is tempered with mercy. In the Psalms, the inspired writer takes frequent occasion, from the natural dangers and distresses to which men are exposed, to magnify not so much the power of the Lord in afflicting mankind, as his goodness in delivering them. He speaks of those who wander in the wilderness without a home, fainting with hunger and thirst, and the captive who sits in darkness and chains, being bound in affliction and iron; of the sick man whose soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and approaches near to the gates of death; of those that go down to the sea, and are overtaken by the overwhelming tempest; of the people that are wasted with scarcity, or weighed down with oppression. From such instances does the Psalmist take occasion to magnify more particularly the goodness of the Lord, in "bringing men out of their distresses," when they "cry unto him in their trouble." It is of the divine mercy that we are not consumed by calamity. Were we dealt with by the Almighty according to our transgression of his laws, there would be no alternative but utter destruction. So far then from complaining of the terrors with which we are occasionally visited, it becomes us rather to be thankful that

they are not more frequent, and that when they occur, they are calculated to chastise rather than to punish, to warn rather than destroy. How easily might the power of the Most High sweep away the whole race of mankind from the face of the earth! and why in fact is not calamity more common, but that "the Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, and that though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." It is the divine compassion that arrests the tempest in the height of its fury, and says to the destroying angel, "It is enough[f]." "Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare his wonderful works to the children of men!" Oh that they would magnify Him, who delivereth them out of their distresses, and learn from the occasional acts of divine correction to acknowledge the innumerable mercies of God which they habitually experience. We seem to think that we have a sort of right to enjoy the good gifts of the Almighty, and to complain of his judgments. The reverse of this is the real truth; were we dealt with on the score of strict justice, our ordinary lot would be miserable, and blessings would rarely, or rather they would never, cheer our path. But God "hath not dealt with us

[f] 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear Him."

Thus should we learn from those awful visitations with which it pleases the divine Providence occasionally to visit us, to look up to God with greater constancy and seriousness; to regard Him as a Being of infinite majesty and power, whom it is the highest arrogance to offend, and the most deplorable folly to resist; as a Being, whose wrath is more dreadful than the consuming fire, and whose favour is better than life; as a Being, who hates the slightest taint of sin, yet, in order to lead sinners to repentance, is compassionate and long-suffering towards them, "crowning us" daily, in the midst of all our thoughtlessness and ingratitude, "with loving-kindness and tender mercies." To know this gracious and mighty God, is the great business, the great duty, end, and interest of man. Happy those who are awakened to the remembrance of Him even by the severest dispensations of his providence, and who are thus led to view their Maker's hand in the sunshine, as well as in the storm; in the abundance which covers their daily board, as well as in the devastation which occasionally wastes their fields; in their habitual safety, no less than in their uncommon dangers! "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man

glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

Neither let us rest in the contemplation of what is done in the earth. We are Christians, and the religion of Christ is conversant mainly, not with things in earth, but with heavenly things. In the world around us we see, as in an obscure mirror, numerous and certain, yet faint, reflexions of the wisdom, and power, and goodness, of God. But it is into the Gospel that we must look for a more full disclosure of the divine dealings with mankind. The events of external nature may lead us to a kind of natural religion. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand" from them "the loving-kindness of the Lord," and perceive that he exerciseth judgment also and righteousness. But natural religion refers us for fuller light to the word of God, which teaches us not only what is done in the earth, but what will be done hereafter in the world to come. From revelation we may learn; (and to these considerations allow me in conclusion to solicit your earnest attention;) from revelation then let us learn, in con-

nexion with our present subject, the following important lessons.

I. To understand aright the difficulties of our present lot; II. to bear its trials; and, III. to improve all its events to our spiritual advantage.

I. In the first place, the word of God enables us to understand aright the difficulties of this present life. There is, if we may so speak, an irregularity in the natural afflictions of mankind. They happen equally to all; to the righteous and to the wicked; to those who serve God, as well as to those who wilfully forget him. But revelation conducts our view steadily forward to that state of retribution, when the same apparent confusion will no longer prevail, but the righteous will be severed from the wicked, the one to be summoned to the throne of God, the other to be excluded from his presence into outer darkness for ever.

II. Again, the word of God enables the pious Christian to bear the trials of life with patience and hope. Many, it is to be feared, have deeply felt the recent dispensations of the Almighty, not merely in the impressions made upon their minds at the time, but in the subsequent effects upon their secular prospects. At the very crisis when

their hopes had been raised by the cheering indications of approaching abundance, suddenly the scene is reversed, the earth is stript at once of her verdant robe, and by the violence of the storm left almost naked and desolate. Under such disappointments consolation may be sought, and to some degree may be found, in philosophy, or in other sources besides religion. But the only solid comfort under all distresses is that which the Scriptures supply. None but this can fully soothe the troubled breast of man. No hand can effectually heal, but that same almighty one which inflicted the wound. I have already adverted to that consolatory declaration of Scripture which instructs us, that "God doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men." He does not take delight, as the heathens supposed the Supreme Being to do, in thwarting human prosperity, but "pitieth us as a father pitieth his children." His dealings with us are dictated at once by infinite wisdom and unbounded mercy; and on this ground implicit acquiescence in the divine will is not only a necessary, but a most reasonable, duty. It is necessary, because God is almighty; it is reasonable, because he is infinitely wise and good.

It is the part of a Christian pastor to sympathize with his fellow-Christians in their troubles, and to direct them to true sources of consolation. And happily he need not be at a loss; for he

can direct them to God himself as their refuge, and point to the divine mercy for comfort under those very troubles which the divine power has inflicted. "Call upon me in the time of trouble," is the command of God, "and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." We must not conclude that the divine Being is angry, because he afflicts us; or, if angry, that he is unwilling to be appeased. He expressly commands us to bring our troubles to the throne of grace, 'Call upon me.' He assures us it shall not be in vain, 'I will deliver thee.' To cry unto the Lord in our trouble, is but the prelude to his delivering us out of our distress. The deliverance may not be such as we anticipate or desire, but in some way or other it is certain, if we sincerely seek it from God, to be such as we shall in the end be thankful for. God will not only deliver those who call upon him, but they shall themselves 'glorify' him for it.

III. Finally, the word of God teaches us to improve all the events of life to our spiritual advantage. In this life we are subject to storms and tempests, to dangers and disappointments. How ardently then should we desire to attain to that world where no such trials await us, and to exchange our uncertain possessions here for the true riches which Christ has prepared for his followers! This would be comfort indeed, to feel

a humble yet solid persuasion, that whatever we lose by the accidents of this being, is nothing in comparison of what is "reserved" for us "in heaven;" and that if our trials are borne with Christian faith and patience, they serve only to enhance our future glory. It is, in fact, the grand conclusion in which all our meditations should terminate, the making sure our calling and election unto eternal life. We have here no undisturbed rest, no abiding riches, no sure habitation; but there is a glorious rest which remaineth for the people of God; there is solid treasure above for those whose hearts are set upon it; and there are everlasting and ever-blessed habitations into which we may be received in heaven.

Only let us be sure that we are striving to enter into that rest; that our hearts are really set upon that treasure; and that we are endeavouring to make to ourselves friends, who shall receive us into those eternal mansions. It is to those who truly serve God in the faith of Christ, and exclusively to them, that the consolations of Christianity belong. We must comply with the terms of the Gospel, if we would experience its blessings; we must obey Christ, if we would rejoice in him. For we must not forget, that, besides the glory which shall be revealed hereafter, there are also terrors to come, with which nothing that we witness here is for a moment to be compared, and from which we cannot hope to be delivered,

pursuit of it, continually higher.. For the conduct of most men, much more of the sincere, though ever below their standard of duty, yet rises as that is raised, and falls with its descent. Nor is it any vain and impracticable notion of perfection which we would propose, (forgetful of the frailty and corruption which adhere to our nature,) but that progressive improvement of character, of which both as individuals and as a species we are capable, and in the cultivation of which our true attainable excellence consists. And in pursuing this, it is not to be forgotten, that the advantages which we enjoy in the examples of past times, place us under a proportionate responsibility; whilst as connected with future generations, we are bound to hand on the torch of righteousness, as we have received it, with an unimpaired at least, if not increasing, flame, that as far as on us depends, the progress of the Gospel in the renovation and gradual amelioration of a fallen world may not be impeded; but that we may, each one of us, under the guidance and blessed influence of the Holy Spirit, enjoy the sacred satisfaction, not only of imitating what is good, but of leading others also to the practice of it through the force of a truly *Christian example.*

SERMON XX.

AN ORDINATION SERMON [a].

1 Cor. xii. 12.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

IN every society, the maintenance of order is necessary to its continuance and well-being. This is obviously the case of all civil communities. Each commonwealth has one or more, in whom the supreme power is lodged; and under whom other magistrates are placed, with their respective functions allotted to them in due subordination. Without this regular distribution of duty, not only among those who are in authority, but throughout every rank and station of life, it would be impossible that states could flourish, or even exist. We should either become

[a] Preached at an Ordination, holden at the Cathedral Church, Barbadoes, by the Lord Bishop of Barbadoes, Feb. 13, 1825.

indolent from not feeling any peculiar responsibility; or we should waste our activity in irregular efforts, from having no express object, which it would be especially incumbent upon us to promote, or any definite path to pursue. The same distribution of duty, the same distinction of the peculiar responsibility of its respective members, is equally necessary in the Church. The general precepts of our religion are incumbent upon all; in like manner as the obligations of a good citizen attach equally to each member of the community. Every Christian is called upon, for example, to be devout and temperate, to be just and charitable. But beyond these and similar duties, it is requisite that each should have his peculiar function, according to the place which he occupies in the Christian community. "The body is not one member, but many;" and "all members have not the same office." "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members in the body as it hath pleased him;" giving to each its peculiar function, that they may be dependent one upon another, and cooperate together to the well-being of the whole frame. It is by this comparison that St. Paul illustrates the order which should exist in the Church. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body,

being many, are one body: so also is Christ." Or, as he explains himself shortly after, "Ye are *the body of Christ*, and *members* in particular."

As members then of this body, it becomes our duty to consider what place in it we hold; that so we may the better please Him, whose members we are, even Christ, who is "the head of the body." The Scriptures exhort "every man that is among us not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think;" not to rate himself above his rank; "but to think soberly;" to learn with humility his true place in the Church, and to attend diligently to his appropriate duties. The apostolic rule is, that "all things should be done" in a becoming manner, and with due regularity, "decently and in order." "For God," we are told, "is not the author of confusion, but of peace," as was observable "in all the Churches of the saints" existing when the apostle wrote[b]. To preserve this peaceable order in his Church, to provide, in short, for the due performance of every duty, without confusion, and with a sense, at the same time, of individual responsibility, it seemed fit to our blessed Lord to select, first of all, his *apostles*, to endue them with peculiar gifts and powers, and to send them forth to plant his religion in the world; he made this their especial duty, the

[b] 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

neglect of which would have been as perilous in them, as the usurpation of the office would have been presumptuous in others. "Necessity," says St. Paul, "is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel: for if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, *a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me.*" The apostolical office ceased with the necessity for it. Those individuals who were thus distinguished, are called in Scripture, "foundation stones" of the Church of God[c]. They were sent to make the first publication of the Gospel, and to attest its truth, once for all, "with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." In this highest branch of their office the apostles had no successors: but they were *also* commissioned to provide for the future government and ministration of the Church, by delegating to others part of that authority and responsibility which they had received immediately from our Lord. As the Father had sent the Son not only to publish the Gospel himself, but to commission his apostles to do the same; so did Christ send them with a similar power of appointing ministers to succeed them.

Accordingly we find the twelve appointing *deacons*, who should preside over the daily minis-

[c] Eph. ii. 20.

tration to the wants of the Christians; and who were also employed in the office of preachers. Even these subordinate ministers were not appointed without scrupulous care. They were to be "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." When thus selected, they were presented to the apostles, and ordained by them with prayer and the laying on of hands.

If we pursue the apostolical history, even under that brief form in which it is narrated in the book of Acts, we shall observe other ministers appointed in the Church distinct from the deacons just mentioned, ministers, whose office it was to rule in the different Churches, founded by the labours of the apostles. They were known by the name of elders or *presbyters;* titles precisely the same in signification. The deacon had no rule in the Church; he was entirely a subordinate minister, appointed to assist the apostle or the priest. The priest, on the other hand, was ordained for the very purpose of ruling in an individual Church. When St. Paul and St. Barnabas had made converts in different towns of Asia, "they ordained elders in every Church" to preside over it, making them "overseers of the flock," that as shepherds they might "feed the Church of God," and, by ruling it well, be counted worthy of double honour. In this manner did the apostles provide assistance in the ministration of the Church by the

appointment of deacons, whilst by the ordination of priests they took care that the Churches should each of them have one or more individuals to watch over them, and be, in fact, their pastors. The general government of the Churches remained in the hands of the apostles, who were, for some time, the only *bishops*. For their office, we must observe, included the episcopal; they *ordained* deacons and priests; they *confirmed* the new converts, whom others had baptised; they *visited* the Churches; and to their authority it was that *appeal* was made, when occasions occurred of doubt or difficulty. The apostle St. Paul speaks expressly of "*the care of all the Churches*" which he had established, as constituting a part of his laborious office.

In the course of time, as the number of Christian Churches increased, the apostles found it expedient to appoint others to relieve their labours, by aiding them in the discharge of the episcopal functions. For this purpose it was that Timothy was left at Ephesus by St. Paul, as the apostle himself declares in his Epistles to that distinguished Christian. "I besought thee," the apostle writes, "to abide at Ephesus, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine," different from what they had received from him. Here we observe Timothy placed in the Church of Ephesus, not merely as

an elder or priest, but with authority over the elders themselves. To the same Timothy, St. Paul sends also his apostolical directions for the celebration of public worship, the selection and ordination of subordinate ministers, the encouragement of those who discharged their office well, the censure of offenders, and the arrangement, in short, of all those matters which pertain to the general oversight of the Church, and which are included in the functions of a bishop. "These things," saith the apostle, "I write unto thee, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

As Timothy was placed at Ephesus, with a charge expressly committed to him[d] by the apostle to take the oversight of the Church in that neighbourhood, in like manner, a delegation of episcopal authority was made to Titus over the Church of Crete. He was left in that island, we are told, for this cause, that he might "set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city;" and directions are given to him by the apostle similar to those, which the Epistles to Timothy contain.

It is evident then that the New Testament contains an indirect, yet distinct, recognition of

[d] 1 Tim. i. 18.

the three orders of deacon, priest, and bishop. It is equally unquestionable, that these orders existed subsequently in the Church; that they are expressly noticed by the earliest ecclesiastical writers, and that they continued to exist universally, with such exceptions only as condemn themselves, (the exceptions, I mean, of heretical Christians,) until after fifteen centuries had elapsed. Some of the reformed Churches were driven by unfavourable circumstances to depart from what many even among themselves acknowledged to have been the ancient practice of the Church, and which they were anxious to retain.

The Church of England, free from any such necessity, has retained the ancient apostolical form of government. In reforming herself from popery, she rejected only its errors, not wishing to cast away, together with them, aught of valuable or sacred that the Church of Rome had handed down from primitive times. The English Church revered the signs of hoary antiquity, and bowed with submission to the seal of apostolic sanction. On these principles, she permits not her members to assume the sacred offices at their own discretion. As was observed in the Church of God among the Jews, and in the case of the ministers whom the apostles ordained, of the apostles themselves, and even of our Lord, that no one took upon him the sacred office "but he

that was called;" so, in the Church of England, "it is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same, by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard[e]." The notion of a self-constituted teacher seems to her to be not only inconsistent with humility in the individual, and repugnant to the good order of the Church, but to imply a want of proper authority in those who are to be "accounted of as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God;" and who should therefore derive their ministry and stewardships from his appointment, in whose name they act. When lawfully chosen and called, the candidate for the ministry is first admitted into the office of deacon. In this lowest gradation, he contributes, by assisting the priest in a portion of his duties, to promote the more efficient discharge of spiritual functions, and enjoys an opportunity of becoming, as our Church has expressed it, "perfect, and well expert, in the things appertaining to the ecclesiastical administration;" so that, if found faithful and diligent, he may be admitted in due time "to the order of the priesthood[f]." "For they," observes an

[e] Article xxiii.

[f] Rubric after "The Ordering of Deacons."

apostle, "who have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." The office of the priest involves a higher degree of responsibility. He is called not merely to assist another, but to be himself the shepherd of the flock; to feed them with sound doctrine, to lead their devotions, to minister to them rightly and duly the holy sacraments, to set before them both in his person and family examples of Christian piety, to watch over them against "erroneous and strange doctrines," to admonish them of their faults, to keep them, as far as he can, in peace and charity among themselves, and in the unity of the universal Church. For such a charge what human strength shall be sufficient? If the aid of God's Holy Spirit be necessary to the ordinary Christian, how much more to the Christian minister! That holiness which is required of all, is in him expected to be exemplary. His knowledge of the truth must be sufficient not only for his own information in the way of life, but so abundant, so sound, combined too with such an aptitude for teaching, that it may enlighten also, fully and safely, the paths of many others. Well then does our religion encourage its ministers to look and to pray, not indeed for miraculous assistance, yet for wisdom and ability proportioned to their need. If the divine Founder of our Church has caused different orders of men

to be set apart in it for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," we may rest assured he will not be wanting to them, if they be not wanting to themselves. He who is as the head of the body, will not withhold his supplies of strength from any of the members, least of all from those whose function is so immediately connected with the health of all. When our Lord sent forth the apostles to make disciples of all nations, he promised to be with them himself alway, even unto the end of the world: a promise which must evidently extend to the successors of the apostles, those to whom they transmitted their office of Christian ministers; and who are at this day employed in making Christian disciples, and teaching them to observe the commands of Christ. The apostles themselves have long been removed from the labours of teaching mankind; but the promise of our Lord, that he would be with his ministers in this work, extends to the end of time. Wherefore let not those who are thus employed, or who are entering upon the momentous vocation, despair, as they otherwise might, from a consciousness of their own weakness. Trusting in the promise of their Lord, and for his merits' sake imploring continually the help of his Holy Spirit, let them proceed with prudence indeed and caution, with labour and perseverance, with a constant use of all le-

gitimate means, yet with alacrity and good courage, knowing on whom they rely.

It is indeed no light work in which the candidate for holy orders desires to engage. It is one to which he should come with seriousness and humility, and with a deep sense of the responsibility which he contracts, in regard to the charity which should prompt his views, the fidelity and soundness of his doctrine, the zeal and prudence of his conduct, the purity of his life; in a word, the guide and instructor of others, should himself be distinguished as a good and wise disciple of our common Lord. Happily this is not an unattainable perfection. In her history the Christian Church can enumerate many such ministers. To those who are succeeding them, she holds out triumphantly their good examples, directing them to the same source from which that exemplary excellence was derived, even the Holy Ghost the Comforter; of whom our Lord promised that he should come to supply his place, and to be in an especial manner with his ministers, until the world should be no more.

But great as is the charge committed to the clergy in regard to the edification of the Church, the responsibility is not exclusively theirs. If it be the duty of the minister to *teach*, it is that of the people to *learn*, the divine will; if he is devoutly to *conduct* the public worship of God, they are bound to *join* in adoration of their com-

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office of others. He may at the least exhibit in his life a Christian example, and thus excite in his neighbour a love of what is excellent. If indeed we are engaged in "the ministry, let us wait upon our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, upon exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness;" endeavouring each, in his proper sphere, to adorn the doctrine of his Saviour by a life agreeable to the Christian faith, and so to promote, at once, the welfare of the Church, and his own salvation.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermon was originally published, by request, in the island of Antigua, with the accompanying Dedication; which, it is hoped, the distinguished Individual to whom it is addressed will still allow the Author the satisfaction of prefixing.

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sow as you will; but with this clear understanding, that as you *sow*, so shall you *reap*, and thus become instruments to yourselves of punishment through his justice, or through his mercy of reward. As sure as a base seed will produce a base plant, or a poisonous seed a poisonous plant, so certainly will a worldly practice terminate in corruption, and holiness alone spring up hereafter into everlasting life.

Let us make then our option. If so determined, let us look only to this present world; let us think only of the body; let us study only to be rich; let us spend our money exclusively upon our own wants, comforts, amusements, pleasures; let us have regard simply to our interests, and think nothing of our duties; let self be all in all, God and our neighbour nothing. But mark the result; and let us make up our minds for *that* also. The objects of our pursuit are passing away, and the end is "corruption:" we may enjoy them for a short time, and then they will *die*. And for the man, thus exclusively devoted to time and self, what remains when the business of this brief life is over; when his pursuits are cut short by death, and can no longer be continued? What harvest has he provided for himself in the world to come? *Corruption* still; —the "gnawing worm," the "devouring fire."

Shall we plunge, my brethren, into this dismal gulf; and, for the sake of 'reaping of the flesh,'

incur a speedy loss of all we now cherish, and then of our immortal souls too? God forbid we should be so infatuated, so mad, so desperate! Let us instead give up the unprofitable and dangerous labour of "sowing to the flesh;" let us remember that undying "spark of heavenly flame," which the Spirit of God hath breathed into us. Yea let us "sow to the spirit," that "of the spirit" we may "reap everlasting life."

What is it, then, to sow to the spirit? What, my brethren, but to live for that better part of our nature which is heavenly and immortal, but which, through the corruption we inherit, is so constantly in danger of being debased, subdued, and brought into captivity, by the flesh? To "sow to the spirit," is to seek, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, the restoration of the spirit to the divine favour, to cultivate its improvement in this life, and so to provide for its happiness in the next. These must become the grand *objects* of our pursuit: and accordingly the whole ordering of our principles and practice must be subservient, more or less directly, to the interests of the soul; and every thing, even the commonest actions of our lives, be invested thus with a spiritual importance and value. He who sows to his flesh, compels his spirit to stoop and bend, in order to become the slave of his pleasures, or avarice, or

low worldly ambition. He who sows to the spirit, compels his animal nature to serve the soul, and by making every thing a matter of conscience before God, to convert the whole course of his actions, by virtue of the motive from which they are done, and the end to which they are directed, into a spiritual service, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ; that so all things may work together for his final good, to the increase of his spiritual harvest in the day of retribution.

Not that the Christian is insensible to present things. He does not choose misery for its own sake. His aim is happiness; and no man pursues happiness more decidedly or more eagerly than he. For this very reason he is unwilling to depend upon those fleeting enjoyments, whose end is corruption. He may taste them in passing, as far as they are not forbidden; but it is with moderation: he remembers how soon they would fail and disappoint him, and bends his main endeavours to that kind of present happiness which results from a consciousness of endeavouring, by the help of the Holy Ghost, to be and to do that which is acceptable to God through Christ, which is worthy of an immortal being, and which shall terminate not in corruption, but in life.

It is to this description of happiness that I now, in the name of your Redeemer, invite you,

Taught by his word that the only way to peace at present, and to bliss hereafter, is to sow to the spirit, and that the other course of sowing to the flesh, however joyous for a while, is full, in the end, of disappointment and dismay, I beseech you to be wise in time, and so to order yourselves and your actions now, that the end may be joyful, no less than the beginning, and that your souls may be saved in the day of the Lord. To do this, it is not necessary to withdraw from your secular occupations, and retire to the hermit's cell. But it *is* necessary that you should *habitually* live as immortal beings, that you should habitually look to the unseen world, and habitually act as responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ, considering every thing you have as a talent put into your hands from your divine Master, for the abuse of which to mere worldly purposes you will certainly be punished hereafter; whilst for its improvement in the cause of virtue and piety you will no less certainly, for his merit's sake, be gloriously rewarded. Thus actuated, you will make your worldly transactions an occasion of justice and equity; your trials, of patience; your food, of temperance; your abundance, of charity. Instead of making "provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," you will, under all circumstances, be cultivating some or other of "the fruits of righteousness," and be gaining friends in heaven by the right use of those very

things out of which the unrighteous construct their idol, Mammon.

Besides the opportunity, which every occasion thus affords, of promoting the improvement and happiness of our souls, by a Christian discharge of the duty attached to it, there are obviously some occasions which touch us more nearly in our eternal interests, and afford us opportunities of more *immediately* sowing to the spirit.

The words of our text were originally written by St. Paul with a view to a case of this nature, namely, the providing for our spiritual interests by the support of a Christian ministry; to our conduct in which matter the Almighty is represented as having strict regard, so as to feel himself "mocked" (though not with impunity) by those who refuse to make a due return to their spiritual pastors. "Let him that is taught in the word," saith the apostle, "communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Those who prefer devoting their possessions exclusively to selfish or secular purposes, have an unquestionable right, it may be, as far as human law is concerned, to do so. But the Almighty views the matter differently. What is contributed from our possessions, in a Christian spirit and in a right manner, to the due support and advance-

ment of our holy religion, is considered by God as given to himself, and as sown to the advantage of our souls. Thus it appears from the context, that the *pious* employment of our worldly possessions, or other means of usefulness, was particularly in the apostle's view, when he wrote the words of our text.

But not only deeds of piety, but deeds of *charity* also, are expressly mentioned by St. Paul. After adverting to the rich advantage of sowing to the spirit, he goes on: "And let us not be weary in well-doing; for, in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us *do good* unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Deeds, then, *of piety and deeds of charity* are to be considered as preeminently a part of that service which is pleasing to God, and which is figuratively termed by the apostle a sowing to the spirit. How much more those deeds which are *at once pious and charitable!* which have in view the maintenance and diffusion of the light of the Gospel, and that amongst those more particularly who have not the means themselves of providing for these blessings, but are made dependent by Providence upon their richer neighbours, for the very purpose of calling forth those holy acts of Christian sympathy and faith, which tend not more to benefit others, than to bless ourselves.

Amongst the many occasions afforded you of thus uniting piety and charity to your own eternal good, I have undertaken this day to recommend to you one, which furnishes you with an excellent opportunity of complying with the exhortation of the apostle: I mean the support of that institution, which, by God's blessing, has already been liberally begun amongst us, in connexion with the venerable *Society*, established in England now more than a century, *for promoting Christian knowledge*. In fulfilling this duty, I thought it advisable to lay my foundations deep. It is not my object, nor my wish, to produce a mere momentary feeling, and at whatever risk of deluding my hearers, to swell the funds of the institution, however inadequate those funds may be to their holy purposes. No! important as it is that the institution should receive your aid, it is equally important that you should give that aid from a right principle. It is necessary that you should feel, that you are bound, as spiritual beings, to embrace every unobjectionable opportunity in your power of doing good, especially to the souls of men. It is necessary both to yourselves, and also to the cause which we now plead.

For what is it that we fear? Is it the scruples of the conscientious Christian, who is really interested about his soul's welfare? There may, indeed, be some of this class, the difference of

whose sentiments from our own we regret, whose honest scruples we respect, and whose co-operation we would gladly conciliate. But it is not *their* objections we so much fear, as the indifference of him who "careth for none of these things," the lukewarmness of professed friends. It is for this reason that I have taken so much pains to remove, in the very outset, that difficulty, which every religious and most charitable institutions must find in their way, from that callous insensibility to things spiritual, that devouring attention to the things of time, and sense, and self, to which, we well know, we are both by nature and example perilously liable. As long as this obstacle remains, there can be little hope of cordial support to any measure, whose professed object is heaven, and not earth; the soul, and not the body; the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, not of our own possessions. It is sufficient, I trust, to have laid this consideration fully and candidly before you, in order to place you on your guard against the danger to which I have so freely adverted, and to which even those, who are sincerely pious, do not cease to be exposed.

They, indeed, who *deliberately* prefer the luxury of self-indulgence to the luxury of doing good; who, when pleasure invites, have enough, and to spare, and for the gratification of their own desires seldom are in want of means, but, when

charity and piety implore their aid, become at once poor, and unable to attend to the call;—they, doubtless, will find reasons enough to silence the voice of conscience, should her whispers respond, within their breast, to the words of the preacher. To persons steeled in selfishness, or immersed in worldly projects of their own, it is idle to talk of the wants of their neighbour, especially of his spiritual wants; it is in vain to remind them of the importance of the "one thing needful," or to urge upon them the value of the immortal soul. To such I do not appeal. Were there any such in this Christian assembly, it would be the duty of the preacher to represent to them their own danger, rather than the needs of others, and to remind them of the awful terms in which selfishness is spoken of in the "word of God." "This know also," saith the apostle, "that in the last days *perilous* times shall come;" and why perilous? "for men," he adds, "shall be *lovers of their own selves*," and consequently addicted, according to their several tempers, to the most unchristian habits of mind—"covetous, boasters, proud; having," in short, "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof;" maintaining the profession of religion, but strangers to its influence. "From such" he exhorts the Christian minister to "turn away[a]."

[a] 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

From such then, if any such were here, I would gladly, on this occasion, turn away to those who have learnt, from the precepts and example of Christ, to deny themselves, and to seek their own genuine good in the exercise of disinterested love to others: to *you* I would turn, whose hearts and whose hands are open, I trust, to feel and to relieve a brother's wants, though they be the wants, not of the flesh, but of the spirit; not of time, but of eternity: to *you* I would turn, who, knowing that the period of your probation is short and very uncertain, are desirous to make the most of it; not in amassing wealth, not in accumulating honours, not in drinking to the dregs the cup of pleasure, not in grasping at a little transitory splendour—these are not the subjects for a Christian's anxiety—but in gladly embracing every reasonable "opportunity of doing good, *especially* to those who are of the household of faith;" especially, I would add, to those for whom your aid is now solicited, who are at once members of the same Christian family, and of the same individual Church, with yourselves.

Were it simply because of its tendency to promote the good order and well-being of society, religion has the strongest claims upon you as citizens only of this lower world. On this tendency I mean not now to enlarge. The subject has been often and ably discussed to the full satisfac-

tion of every candid mind[h]. Indeed every man who has *studied* the nature of the Christian faith, (and, before we pronounce upon it, it is our duty, in common honesty, to examine the subject fairly,) every one who is really acquainted with the Gospel, knows well, that its doctrines and precepts, its promises and threatenings, are calculated to promote the more faithful discharge of every secular duty, by making it a matter of conscience towards God with a view to eternal life. Transgressors may overpower by their influence, or by their cunning may evade, the laws of man. But there is no escaping from the law of God either by force or fraud. The most powerful offender is but a worm before the Almighty; and with the Omniscient concealment is folly. God and our conscience are with us every where. And thus provision is made, under the most solemn sanctions, even as we hope for everlasting life, or are afraid of everlasting punishment, for the cordial and regular discharge of duty, under circumstances when earthly considerations must fail to produce it, and nought remains to deter from sin, but the whisper of conscience, the eye of God,

[h] See, as connected with the state of society in the West Indies, "A Sermon on the importance of giving Religious Instruction to the Slave Population in the West Indies." By the Reverend Archdeacon Eliot. Preached at the Cathedral Church, Barbadoes, Feb. 11, 1827, and published at the request of the Vestry of St. Michael's.

the groans of a dying Saviour, the sound of the archangel's trumpet, brought home to the hesitating soul by the mild yet mighty influence of the Spirit of the Most High.

But I will take it for granted that you need not to be told, that religion is favourable to our best interests in this world: I will take it for granted that you have tried its value in the only effectual way, by making *personal experiment* of its holy power; and that, from *your own experience*, you are fully prepared to acknowledge, that the more the Gospel is known and embraced, the more likely are men of all classes, whether high or low, to be virtuous in their character, and conscientious in their conduct; and that the moral evils of human life, the turbulence and discontent which we sometimes hear of, the malice and revenge, the injustice and oppression, the idleness and barbarism, the licentiousness and profligacy, the selfishness, avarice, and ambition, are to be attributed, not to religion, but to the want or manifest perversion of it: for that religion, so far from being the mother of this monstrous brood, is the parent of purity, peace, and love, of industry and cheerful contentment, of humility and kindness, of justice and fidelity, of disinterested good-will and that heavenly-mindedness, which deprives of their edge most of our ordinary temptations to evil; and that thus, with her family of virtues, religion is, in fact, the

best auxiliary we can desire in promoting our temporal welfare: "the pillar of society, the safeguard of nations, the parent of social order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the passions, and secure to every one his rights; to the laborious, the reward of their industry; to the rich, the enjoyment of their wealth; to nobles, the preservation of their honours; to princes, the stability of their thrones."

I address these considerations to you as citizens of this lower world, and I appeal to your common prudence, and to your personal experience of the salutary effects of religion upon your own character and happiness, if it be not incumbent upon you to promote, as fully and as extensively as you can, a right knowledge of our holy faith. But far be it I should rest here. Far be it that we should confine our view within this earthly horizon! No! our institution appeals to you on much higher grounds. It appeals to you as spiritual and immortal beings, as citizens of a "better country" than any upon earth, as members of that kingdom in which the Son of the Most High is King, angels your fellow-subjects, the throne of God its centre, the universe its boundary, and eternity the limit of its duration. For the coming of this kingdom, for its diffusion in righteousness, and its consummation in glory, we continually pray. But what is prayer without correspondent exertion? It is the cry of

the hypocrite; the task of the formalist; the irresolute vow of the double-minded. Those who *sincerely* pray that "the kingdom of God may come," will delight in being instrumental to its establishment and extension. In other words, the truly pious Christian, who is really interested in the success of his daily prayer, will rejoice in the privilege of being a means, under Providence, of rendering the "good tidings" of the "kingdom of heaven" better known, and its laws better obeyed. For, after all, the prevalence of true religion is the great concern of mankind; her objects those for which we were *created*, to which the kingdoms of the earth *shall* subserve, and with the accomplishment of which this present probationary world shall pass away into oblivion. Great in themselves, doubtless, are the ends of civil policy; and far be it we should not be alive to the alleviation of man's present sufferings, or the furtherance of his present happiness. But immeasurable is the distance between these objects, and such as Christianity is more immediately connected with. When brought into competition with our spiritual interests, those of the present world sink into insignificance; its most substantial joys become a shadow, its heaviest woes a feather, its longest life a moment. As the earth itself is but a dark speck amidst that assemblage of "golden worlds," with which the "arch of heaven is inlaid;" so does

its fortune wane away into absolute nothingness, before the bright and majestic crowd of blessings which Christianity presents to our view. Nothing, indeed, but extreme ignorance or extreme inconsideration, could cause us for a moment to suppose, that man's earthly are of more importance than his heavenly interests. Yet so it is, that the former being nearer to us, and pressing more upon the sense, lead us often to attach to them practically a greater magnitude, than to the others which are removed in the far horizon; just as the neighbouring hillock produces a more vivid and a larger image on the eye, than the distant mountain.

But there are, it may be said, a peculiar body of men, to whom the great business of promoting the eternal welfare of mankind belongs, by the appointment of God, as their allotted office. Still, though the clergy are the authorized ministers of religion, and to promote its influence and extension be their peculiar duty, let it not be supposed that the laity are hereby either exempted or debarred from contributing to this holy work. Of *their* co-operation, encouragement, and support, their ministers stand continually in need. Nor are there wanting ways, in which the lay Christian, without forsaking his own sphere of usefulness, or thrusting himself unprepared or uncalled into the office of the ministry, may yet advance the great cause of religion, which every Christian,

whether lay or clerical, should have deeply [illegible] heart. Of these ways, there is none perhaps, if we except the influence of a Christian example, in which he may lend his aid with greater safety, facility, or hope of success, than in promoting the *education of the young*, and *the dissemination*, amongst persons of all ages, *of the holy Scriptures, and other books* of sound scriptural instruction.

It is as connected with these important objects, that the *Society for promoting Christian knowledge* solicits your attention and support: its object, in the formation of *local committees*, being to open a channel for the supply, at a very moderate expence[c], of books and tracts for the instruction of the young and ignorant, as well as for the edification and improvement of those of more advanced years, or better education. Thus an opportunity is afforded you of aiding the cause of religion, without either abandoning your own duties, or interfering with the peculiar functions of your ministers. Here your endeavours and theirs may unite cordially and without confusion: here they will rejoice to meet you, be thankful for your aid, and feel their labours facilitated, their prospects brighten, in proportion as your

[c] Books are generally granted to Charity Schools and similar purposes *gratuitously;* to the public at large they are sold at the *cost* price; to subscribers the price is *reduced.*

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The *Education* which the "Society for promoting Christian knowledge" has in view, and which "has ever been an object of the Society's especial regard and concern[d]," is the education *of the poor more especially, in the principles of the Christian religion, as professed in our Established Church.*

I will not trespass upon your attention by meeting objections, which have been raised, but so often satisfactorily answered, to any design at all for the education of the poor. The day of such objections appears to be past and gone. By all thinking Christians it seems now to be allowed, that to be able to live as rational and responsible and religious beings, is as necessary to the poor as to the rich; and that it is a disgrace to Christians, wilfully to leave their fellow-creatures in spiritual darkness, ignorant of that Gospel which is *their own* hope and glory, ignorant of the God who made them, of the Saviour who died for them, of the heaven which

[d] See the "General Accounts" of the Society.

he has purchased for those who believe in him, and of the Holy Spirit whom He hath promised to conduct them thither.

But there is a danger, on the other hand also, to be carefully avoided, and especially, perhaps, amongst ourselves;—where the poor are peculiarly circumstanced, and divide themselves into widely different classes, the education of which should obviously be regulated by a reference to the different stations in which Providence has placed them, and the different secular duties which they will in consequence be called upon to perform. The danger, then, which we have to avoid, is that of seeking for the poor an education unfit for them, of attempting to raise them to unnecessary refinement, and thus filling their minds with pitiful self-conceit, or, what is worse, with a restless discontent. Education, when *judiciously* bestowed, becomes a lamp to the poor man in *his own proper path:* but such an education as is unsuitable to his station, as he cannot enter into except superficially, nor at all practically use, is like the weak delusive light on the treacherous fen, or as a firebrand in the hand of a child, or at best but a passing meteor which dazzles the traveller for a time, then leaves him in darkness as before. It is to no such crude projects of chimerical refinement that I entreat your aid: our aims are humbler far, yet higher;—humbler as respects the present world, yet higher as

regards the real elevation of man. We desire not to convert the labouring bondsman, nor indeed any one of our poorer brethren, into a political wrangler or a paltry sciolist; we wish him no such evil; we would raise him, it is true, but it is as a candidate for heaven; we would give him knowledge, but it is the knowledge of his present duties and his future prospects; we would feed his mind, but it is with the bread of life; we would have him enlightened, but it is with the light of immortality.

With these objects in view, the great end which we propose is to encourage the education of the children of the poor in the principles and practice of the Christian faith. If we except an acquaintance, in the case of those at least who are of *free* condition, with the elements of numbers and of writing, the instruction promoted is confined within the sacred circle of Christian truth and duty. And as under the name of Christianity, much may be taught which is not Christian, care is taken, that our religion shall be not only nominally, but really taught; not in a lax and general way, but with a serious attention to what, as members of the Church of England, we believe to be substantial points of faith or practice; notwithstanding the imputations which such a course of proceeding may incur from error on the one hand, or worldly indifference on the other. The heretic will accuse us of perverting the truth; the schis-

matic, of unnecessary strictness; while the man of the world may affect to pity our bigotted attachment to what he will consider mere points of arbitrary opinion. For hard names and unfair misrepresentations every one must be prepared, who would act resolutely up to any fixed and consistent principles. *Our* principles, we trust, are those of the Church of Christ. Of that Church we believe the one, to which we belong, to be an ancient, a venerable, and a faithful branch. "Her foundations," we are persuaded, "are upon the holy hill" of Calvary, and many "are the excellent things" which might be spoken of her, did the time allow us to retrace her history. True, she is no mean city even in this present world; true, that "kings" have been her "nursing fathers," and "queens" her "nursing mothers;" true, that she has been maintained, in our favoured empire, with that sober dignity, with which it became a great Christian nation to invest their holy faith. But her boast is not in these things. Her glory is that "the Lord hath loved her gates, and is well known in her palaces as a sure refuge; that he hath done great things for her already," at many a trying season, and will, we humbly trust, "uphold her for ever." Yea, may He ever raise up for her protectors and friends in our princes and our people, and may his Holy Spirit continue to send forth, as of old, faithful ministers to serve and to defend her

cause! For "walk about" our "Zion," and go round about her, mark well her bulwarks, consider her towers, and tell them that come after you, that the foundation upon which they are built throughout is that of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. Tell too of the holy martyrs, with whose copious blood her walls have been cemented: and let not the names of her blessed reformers, inscribed indelibly upon her stones, be overlooked by you as worthless: neither let those be forgotten, who, without number, have devoted their learning, their talents, their genius, their piety, their lives, to her service. Generations have rolled by, convulsions and revolutions in our civil polity have taken place, and still the Church of England has stood, the admiration of the Protestant world: let not her own children now despise her, because her stones, though durable as ever, are mellow with age; let them not, from a love of novelty, disparage the beauty of her structure, because, unaltered and unimpaired, it is grown too familiar to their view. Rather, my brethren and fellow-citizens of this holy city, let us all endeavour with one mind, and with one voice let us pray, that it may "prosper" still, and be "at unity in itself." Yea, "pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and com-

panions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good[e]."

Thus persuaded of the excellence of that reformed part of Christ's Church to which we belong, we do not conceive ourselves at liberty to abandon or to retain just what portion we please of her scriptural faith or discipline, but bound in justice to those that come after us to transmit the whole to them, uninjured and unshaken by restless and endless innovations. Accordingly, the instruction which we propose to encourage, even among the labouring classes, though directed mainly to an acquaintance with the Scriptures themselves, embraces also the Catechism and Common Prayer Book of our Church, with an attention to her worship and Sacraments, and a regular adherence to her truly Christian communion.

In thus assisting the poor of our Church to educate their children, what else, in fact, do we, but assist them to fulfil the engagements, which they entered into at the baptism of those children? that they may be enabled to put them in the way of learning those things which every "Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health;" and of "being virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life." Why,

[e] Psalm cxxii.

I could almost ask, why baptize the children of the poor, if they are not afterwards to be instructed? Why give them the name, without the faith, of Christians?

But it is not only to the purposes of education that the Society for promoting Christian knowledge directs her labours. Its assistance, as I have already observed, is held out to persons of all ages; and its aim is to furnish primarily the holy Scriptures, and together with them the Liturgy and Homilies of our Church, besides such a compendious variety of pious and judicious books and tracts on all the leading points of faith and practice, as shall be adapted not only to the different stages of a Christian's life, to the different dangers to which he may be exposed, the duties he may have to perform, the errors to guard against, but, as far as it may be safely done, to the difference of tastes which may happen to prevail.

It would be impossible to enter here into any detailed account of these books and tracts. The catalogue of them is open to public examination in the Reports of the Society. And be it ever remembered, that foremost on the list stand the sacred Scriptures; and that the principal, though not exclusive, object of the Society for promoting Christian knowledge has ever been the distribution of the inspired volume: principal, I say, yet not exclusive. For as the religious reading

of Christians, though conversant mainly with the Bible, and directed, it may be, throughout to the attainment of a more thorough knowledge of holy writ, is also employed upon other books, it is important that they should be provided with these carefully selected from the works of approved writers; and still more is it important that the members of our Church should have a facility of procuring her Book of Common Prayer and her Homilies.

In this country the benefits of an institution which opens to the community an easy channel, through which it may obtain a valuable supply of religious books, are too obvious to be insisted upon. In giving it your support you will at once be scattering blessings around you, and securing them, I may add, to yourselves and to your children.

I might enlarge at much greater length upon the advantages, to which I have now briefly adverted. I might adduce also other reasons for which this ancient Society, so long and so intimately connected with our Established Church, has claims upon the cordial support of the members of that Church. But what I have already said has been, I trust, sufficient to persuade you, that, according to the means which God hath given to each of you, the spiritual interests of yourselves and others have the strongest claims upon your attention, and that a good opportunity

is now furnished in which you may thus sow to the spirit, and in which even those who cannot bestow much, may yet, by the contribution of a little, do much good to their brethren in the household of faith.

I would here leave the cause, of which I have been the unworthy advocate, to your fervent prayers and to your cordial support. Upon both, I trust, we may rely: of both it certainly has need;—of your prayers, that for Christ's sake *HIS* favour and blessing may descend upon it, without whom all our efforts are vain;—of your support, inasmuch as for the advancement even of religion human exertion is the appointed means; without which, to expect success is presumption, not faith; to tempt God, not to trust him.

THE END.

BAXTER, PRINTER, OXFORD.